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Lahuta e Malcís

The Highland Lute

Gjergj Fishta

THE ALBANIAN NATIONAL EPIC

Translated by

Robert Elsie & Janice Mathie-Heck

I.B. TAURIS

THE CENTRE FOR ALBANIAN STUDIES

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Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was by far the greatest and most influential figure of Albanian literature in the first half of the twentieth century. It was he more than any other writer who gave artistic expression to the searching soul of the sovereign Albanian nation. Lauded and celebrated up until the Second World War as the 'national poet of Albania' and as the 'Albanian Homer,' Fishta was to fall into sudden oblivion when the communists took power in November 1944. The very mention of his name became taboo, and such was the fear of him that his home was razed to the ground and, in later years, his bones were dug up and secretly thrown into the river.

After almost half a century of silence, Gjergj Fishta was commemorated openly on 5 January 1991 in Shkodra. During this first public recital of Fishta's works in Albania in forty-five years, the actor at one point hesitated in his lines, and was immediately and spontaneously assisted by members of the audience–who still knew many parts of *The Highland Lute* by heart.

Front cover:
Highland couple from the Gucia region
(Photo: Marubi)

Gjergj Fishta

The Highland Lute

(Lahuta e Malcís)

The Albanian National Epic

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Introduction

The Highland Lute

Although Gjergj Fishta is the author of a total of thirty-seven literary publications, his name is indelibly linked to one great work, indeed to what is perhaps the most astounding creation in all of Albanian literature, the national literary epic 'The Highland Lute.'

The Highland Lute (Alb. *Lahuta e Malcís*) is a 15,613-line historical verse epic, a panorama of northern Albanian history from 1862 to 1913 which mirrors the long Albanian struggle for freedom and independence. This literary masterpiece was composed for the most part between 1902 and 1909, though it was refined and amended by its author over the following quarter of a century. The Highland Lute is a work of great significance to the Albanian people and, at the same time, constitutes the first Albanian-language contribution to world literature.

In 1902, Father Gjergj Fishta had been sent to a northern Albanian mountain village to replace the local parish priest for a time. There he met and befriended the aged tribesman Marash Uci (1810-1914) of Hoti, whom he was to immortalize in verse. In their evenings together, Marash Uci told the young priest of the heroic battles between the Albanian Highlanders and the Montenegrins, in particular of the famed battle at the Rrzhanica Bridge in which Marash Uci had taken part himself. The earliest parts of The Highland Lute, subtitled 'At the Bridge of Rrzhanica,' were printed in Zadar in 1905 and 1907, and were received with enthusiasm in Albania. Subsequent and enlarged editions of The Highland Lute appeared in 1912, 1923, 1931 and 1933. The definitive edition of The Highland Lute in thirty cantos was published in Shkodra in 1937 to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Albanian independence.

Despite the success of The Highland Lute and the preeminence of its author, this and all other works by Gjergj Fishta were banned after the Second World War when the Communists came to power in Albania. The epic was, however, republished in Rome 1958 and Ljubljana 1990, and exists in German and Italian translations.

The Highland Lute is certainly the most powerful and effective epic to have been written in Albanian. Gjergj Fishta chose as his subject matter what he knew best: the heroic culture of his native northern Albanian mountains. It

was his intention with this epic, an unprecedented achievement in Albanian letters, to present the lives of the northern Albanian tribes and of his people in general in a heroic setting. It was the author's fortune at the time to have been at the source of the only intact heroic society in Europe. High Albania, in the north of the country, differed radically from the more advanced and 'civilized' regions of the Tosk south of Albania. What so fascinated foreign ethnographers and visitors to northern Albania at the turn of the last century was the tribal and staunchly patriarchal structure of society in the Highlands, a social system based on customs handed down for centuries by tribal law, in particular by the Code or *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini.

The Highland Lute is strongly inspired by northern Albanian oral verse, both by the cycles of heroic verse, i.e. the octosyllabic *Këngë kreshnikësh* (Songs of the Frontier Warriors), similar to the Serbo-Croatian *junačke pjesme,* and by the equally popular cycles of historical verse of the eighteenth century, similar to Greek klephtic verse and to the *haidutska pesen* of the Bulgarians. Fishta knew well this oral verse sung by the Gheg mountain tribes on their one-stringed instrument, the *lahuta,* and relished in its language and rhythm. The narrative of the epic is therefore replete with the rich, archaic vocabulary and colourful imagery and figures of speech used by the Highland tribes of the north. The language does not make for easy reading nowadays, even for the northern Albanians themselves. The standard metre of The Highland Lute is a trochaic octameter or heptameter which is more in tune with Albanian oral verse than is the classical hexameter of the Latin and Greek epics. The influence of the great epics of classical antiquity, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and Vergil's Aeneid, is nonetheless ubiquitous in The Highland Lute as has been pointed out by a number of scholars, in particular Maximilian Lambertz and Giuseppe Gradilone. Many parallels in style and content have thus transcended the millennia. Fishta himself later translated book five of the Iliad into Albanian.

Among the major stylistic features which characterize The Highland Lute, and no doubt most other epics, are metaphor, alliteration and assonance, as well as archaic figures of speech and hyperbole. The predominantly heroic character of the narrative with its extensive battle scenes is fortunately counterbalanced with lyric and idyllic passages which give The Highland Lute a lightness and poetic grace it might otherwise lack.

The Highland Lute relies heavily on Albanian mythology and legendry. The work is permeated with mythological figures of oral literature who, like the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, observe and, where necessary, intervene in events. Among them are the *zanas*, dauntless mountain spirits who dwell near springs and torrents and who bestow their protection on Albanian warriors; the *oras*, female spirits whose very name is often taboo; the vampire-like *lugats,* the witch-like *shtrigas*, and the *drangues*, semi-human figures born with

wings under their arms and with supernatural powers, whose prime objective in life is to combat and slay the seven-headed, fire-spewing *kulshedras*.

The fusion of the heroic and the mythological is equally evident in a number of characters to whom Fishta attributes major roles in The Highland Lute: Oso Kuka, the fierce and valiant warrior who prefers death over surrender to his Slavic enemy; the old shepherd Marash Uci who admonishes the young fighters to preserve their freedom and not to forget the ancient ways and customs; and the valiant maiden Tringa, who takes care of her dying brother and is resolved to defend her land.

The heroic aspect of life in the mountains is one of the many characteristics which the northern Albanian tribes have in common with their southern Slavic, and in particular Montenegrin, neighbours. The two peoples, divided as they are by language and by the bitter course of history, have a largely common culture. Although the Montenegrins serve as 'bad guys' in the glorification of the author's native land, Fishta was not uninfluenced or unmoved by the literary achievements of the southern Slavs in the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular by verse of Slavic resistance to the Turks. The works of the Franciscan pater Grga Martić (1822-1905) served the young Fishta as a model while the latter was studying in Bosnia. Fishta was also influenced by the writings of an earlier Franciscan writer, Andrija Kačić-Miošić (1704-1760), the Dalmatian poet and publicist of the Enlightenment who is remembered especially for his *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga*, 1756 (Pleasant Talk of Slavic Folk), a collection of prose and poetry on Serbo-Croatian history, and by the works of Croatian poet Ivan Mažuranić (1814-1890), author of the noted romantic epic *Smrt Smail-age Ćengića,* 1846 (The Death of Smail Aga). A further source of literary inspiration for Fishta was the Montenegrin poet-prince Petar Petrovič Njegoš (1813-1851). It is no coincidence that the title The Highland (or Mountain) Lute is similar to Njegoš's *Gorski vijenac*, 1847 (The Mountain Wreath). This verse rendition of Montenegro's heroic resistance to the Turkish occupants is now generally regarded as the national epic of the Montenegrins and Serbs. Gjergj Fishta proved that the Albanian language was also capable of a refined literary epic of equally heroic proportions.

Synopsis of the Epic

The Highland Lute is divided into thirty cantos devoted to the struggle of the Albanian people for freedom and independence in the period from 1862 to 1913.

The first five cantos, known as the cycle of Oso Kuka, are set in the year 1862. Canto I (The Bandits) gives a historical survey of Albanian suffering

under the Turkish yoke, and of the plans of Prince Nikolla of Montenegro to attack Albania. In Canto 2 (Oso Kuka), Oso Kuka of Shkodra sets out with his forty men to counter the attack. Canto 3 (The Booty) is an interlude in which an Albanian shepherd, Avdi Hisa, is slain by the Montenegrins, thus giving Oso Kuka a pretext to take revenge. Avdi's sister bemoans the death of her brother with a traditional lament. The figure of Oso Kuka is further developed in Canto 4 (Vranina), in which the Montenegrin prince sends his finest men to seize the island of Vranina in Lake Shkodra. The poet appeals to the Albanian tribesmen to be as heroic as Oso Kuka. The cycle concludes with Canto 5 (Death), in which Oso Kuka is defeated, takes refuge in a powder tower, and blows himself and his foes up. The Montenegrin flag is raised over the island.

The second section of the epic, set in 1878-1880, begins with Canto 6 (Dervish Pasha), in which a mysterious traveller arrives in Istanbul and pleads with the sultan to save Albania. The sultan seconds Dervish Pasha and fifty battalions of soldiers to repulse Montenegrin forces, but the Congress of Berlin prevents the Turks from advancing. Canto 7 (The Congress of Berlin) focusses on the historical Congress of Berlin of 1878, which gives Prince Nikolla free rein to occupy Hoti, Gruda, Plava and Gucia, indeed all of northern Albania down to the Drin river. In Canto 8 (Ali Pasha of Gucia), Ali Pasha happens upon a fairy-like *ora* in the high mountain pastures who appeals to him to summon all the Albanian Highlanders to war, and bestows on him magic powers. Canto 9 (The League of Prizren) describes the events of the historical meeting of Albanian nobles in 1878, who gather to counter the Treaty of San Stefano and the resolutions of the Congress of Berlin. They are observed from the high mountains by the *ora* of Albania and the *zana* of Sharri, who delight in listening to the fiery speeches of Abdul Frashëri, Shan Deda, Mar Lula, and Ali Pasha. The noblemen resolve to write a letter of protest to the Congress of Berlin. In Canto 10 (Mehmet Ali Pasha), a new Turkish pasha staying at the house of Abdullah Dreni, invites tribal leaders to Gjakova and deceitfully takes them prisoner. Friends besiege the house in order to free their leaders. Dreni is duty bound by the prerequisites of Albanian hospitality to defend his unwanted guest, and both he and the pasha perish in the fighting.

Canto 11 (The Vampire) provides some good comic relief. Prince Nikolla is at home drinking wine. He chides his wife Milena for believing in ghosts. When she retires, however, Nikolla is himself confronted with the ghost of the slain Mehmet Ali Pasha, who demands that he send forces against Albania. Nikolla discusses war plans with his general, Mark Milani. Canto 12 (Marash Uci), the first to have been written and still perhaps the best known, introduces another protagonist of the epic, the aged Marash Uci. Marash hastens to Çun Mula in Hoti and asks him to summon the tribal leaders of Hoti and Gruda to the Church of Saint John's without delay for a council meeting. Marash Uci speaks before the leaders in Canto 13 (At the Church of Saint

John's). The men resolve to take to arms to defend their land, and make Çun Mula their commander. In Canto 14 (At the Bridge of Rrzhanica), the Highlanders of Hoti and Gruda do battle with the forces of Mark Milani. The Montenegrins are defeated at Rrzhanica Bridge and Mark Milani is compelled to take flight. Prince Nikolla in Cetinje is informed of the defeat in Canto 15 (The Herald) and is told that Albanian forces are massing at the border.

Canto 16 (The Kulshedra) forms another interlude with a mythological analogy to the main conflict. The Albanian warriors are introduced as mythological beings called *drangues*, in battle with a dragon-like *kulshedra*. Also interwoven into this canto is the song of the maid Eufrozina of Janina. In Canto 17 (At the Grapevine Pass), two of the *drangue* heroes, on their way home through the mountains, are surprised by the advancing army of Mark Milani. They manage to hold the pass with the help of nearby shepherds, and Milani withdraws, sending his men to attack Sutjeska. The *zanas* take up residence over Sutjeska, and then wait and observe. The battle of Sutjeska is described in Canto 18 (At the Sutjeska Bridge), in which Mark Milani's forces endeavour to take Gucia. The grim scenes of battle are interrupted by a lament on the death of Smajl Arifi. In a long and patriotic invective in Canto 19 (Father Gjon), the priest of Kelmendi, no doubt a personification of Fishta himself, bemoans the Albanians' sufferings at the hands of their Slav neighbours. He then sets off for Sutjeska with the men of Kelmendi behind him. Canto 20 (The Lekas) offers more grim scenes of battle at Sutjeska. In the midst of the fighting, Bec Patani recognizes his Slavic blood brother Milo Spasi and brings him to safety. The story of their friendship is narrated as an interlude. Night falls over the bloodbath. Father Gjon reappears in Canto 21 (Mediation). He visits Mark Milani to arrange for a truce in order to bury the dead.

In Canto 22 (Tringa), savage fighting continues in nearby Nokshiq, where the maiden Tringa is devotedly caring for her dying brother, Curr Ula. When the Slav warrior Gjur Kokoti approaches, she shoots him in the chest, only to be shot in the head herself. Canto 23 (At the Farmhouse of Curr Ula) continues with more scenes of bloody battle. Tringa's death is avenged. Mark Milani resolves to call in the army to assist his fighters.

Canto 24 (The *Zana* of Mount Vizitor) provides an idyllic interlude to the fighting. The Great *Zana* is outraged at witnessing the murder of her childhood companion Tringa. She brings the body back to the alpine pastures where it is buried ceremoniously at the foot of a linden tree. In a spirit of vengeance, the Great *Zana* calls upon all good men to hasten to the battlefield of Nokshiq. Canto 25 (Blood Vengeance Exacted), the longest of the cantos, is devoted once again to the savagery of battle, observed from on high by the Great *Zana* of Mount Vizitor and by the *Ora* of Montenegro. Other figures of Albanian mythology are introduced, as vengeance is exacted for the murder of Tringa.

In Canto 26 (The New Age), another interlude, the poet, spending the spring at the Franciscan convent in Lezha, invites the *zana*, his muse, to visit him. The long history of Lezha and Albania are portrayed. After much suffering, a new day has dawned. Freedom is at hand. In Canto 27 (The Committee), we find ourselves in the twentieth century. In 1908, a committee of Turkish pashas gathers in Istanbul to decide the fate of Albania. Hardliner Turgut Pasha resolves to lead a military expedition to Albania to stifle the independence movement. Canto 28 (Dedë Gjo' Luli), set in 1910-1911, focusses on the figure of Dedë Gjo' Luli, champion of the Albanian cause against the Turks. Another hero, Llesh Nik Daka, is betrayed, mortally wounded, and taken, according to his last wish, to the monastery of Rubik to be buried. Turkish forces win the day. In Canto 29 (The Balkan War), set in 1912, the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef warns the sultan to leave the Albanians alone. The King of England invites the Great Powers to London to settle the matter. The final Canto 30 (The Conference of London) provides a humorous description of the gathering of the Seven Kings in London. After much dispute, they agree to recognize Albania's independence. The red and black flag of Albania finally flutters in the breeze over the land of Scanderbeg "like the wings of all God's angels."

The author, Gjergj Fishta

Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was by far the greatest and most influential figure of Albanian literature in the first half of the twentieth century. It was he more than any other writer who gave artistic expression to the searching soul of the sovereign Albanian nation. Lauded and celebrated up until the Second World War as the 'national poet of Albania' and as the 'Albanian Homer,' Fishta was to fall into sudden oblivion when the communists took power in November 1944. The very mention of his name became taboo for forty-six years.

Fishta was born on 23 October 1871 in the Zadrima village of Fishta near Troshan in northern Albania where he was baptized by the Franciscan missionary and poet, Leonardo De Martino (1830-1923). He attended Franciscan schools in Troshan and Shkodra where as a child he was deeply influenced both by the talented De Martino and by a Bosnian missionary, pater Lovro Mihačević, who instilled in the intelligent lad a love for literature and for his native language. In 1886, when he was fifteen, Fishta was sent by the Order of the Friars Minor to Bosnia, as were many young Albanians destined for the priesthood at the time. It was at Franciscan seminaries and institutions in Sutjeska, Livno and Kreševo that the young Fishta studied theology, philosophy and languages, in particular Latin, Italian and Serbo-Croatian, to prepare

himself for his ecclesiastical and literary career. During his stay in Bosnia he came into contact with Bosnian writer Grga Martić and the Croatian poet Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević (1865-1908) with whom he became friends and who aroused a literary passion in him. In 1894 Gjergj Fishta was ordained as a priest and admitted to the Franciscan order.

On his return to Albania in February of that year, Fishta was given a teaching position at the Franciscan college in Troshan and subsequently a posting as parish priest in the village of Gomsiqja. In 1899, he collaborated with Preng Doçi (1846-1917), the influential abbot of Mirdita, with prose writer and priest Dom Ndoc Nikaj (1864-1951) and with folklorist Pashko Bardhi (1870-1948) to found the *Bashkimi* (Unity) Literary Society of Shkodra which set out to tackle the thorny Albanian alphabet question. This society was subsequently instrumental in the publication of a number of Albanian-language school texts and of the *Bashkimi* Albanian-Italian dictionary of 1908, still the best dictionary of Gheg dialect. By this time, Fishta had become a leading figure of cultural and public life in northern Albania, in particular in Shkodra.

In 1902, Gjergj Fishta was appointed director of Franciscan schools in the district of Shkodra where he is remembered in particular for having replaced Italian with Albanian for the first time as the language of instruction there. This effectively put an end to the Italian cultural domination of northern Albanian Catholics and gave young Albanians studying at these schools a sense of national identity. On 14-22 November 1908, he participated in the Congress of Monastir as a representative of the Bashkimi Literary Society. This congress, attended by Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim delegates from Albania and abroad, was held to decide upon a definitive Albanian alphabet, a problem to which Fishta had given much thought. Indeed, the congress had elected Gjergj Fishta to preside over a committee of eleven delegates who were to make the choice.

In October 1913, almost a year after the declaration of Albanian independence in Vlora, Fishta founded and began editing the Franciscan monthly periodical *Hylli i Dritës* (The Day-Star) which was devoted to literature, politics, folklore and history. With the exception of the turbulent years of the First World War and its aftermath, 1915-1920, and the early years of the dictatorship of Ahmet Zogu, 1925-1929, this influential journal of high literary standing was published regularly until July 1944 and became as instrumental for the development of northern Albanian Gheg culture as Faik bey Konitza's Brussels journal *Albania* had been for the Tosk culture of the south. From December 1916 to 1918, Fishta edited the Shkodra newspaper *Posta e Shqypniës* (The Albanian Post), a political and cultural newspaper which was subsidized by Austria-Hungary under the auspices of the *Kultusprotektorat*, despite the fact that the occupying forces did not entirely trust Fishta because of his nationalist aspirations. Also in 1916, together with

writers Luigj Gurakuqi (1879-1925), Ndre Mjeda (1866-1937) and Mati Logoreci (1867-1941), Fishta played a leading role in the Albanian Literary Commission (*Komisija Letrare Shqype*) set up by the Austro-Hungarian authorities on the suggestion of Consul General August Ritter von Kral (1859-1918) to decide on questions of orthography for official use and to encourage the publication of Albanian school texts. After some deliberation, the Commission decided to use the central dialect of Elbasan as a neutral compromise for a standard literary language. This was much against the wishes of Gjergj Fishta who regarded the Gheg dialect of Shkodra, in view of its strong contribution to Albanian culture at the time, as best suited. Fishta hoped that his northern Albanian *koine* would soon serve as a literary standard for the whole country, much as Dante's language had served as a guide for literary Italian. Throughout these years, Fishta continued teaching and running the Franciscan school in Shkodra, known from 1921 on as the *Collegium Illyricum* (Illyrian College), which had become the leading educational institution of northern Albania. He was now also an imposing figure of Albanian literature.

In August 1919, Gjergj Fishta served as secretary-general of the Albanian delegation attending the Paris Peace Conference and, in this capacity, was asked by the president of the delegation, Msgr. Luigj Bumçi (1872-1945), to take part in a special commission to be sent to the United States to tend to the interests of the young Albanian state. There, he visited Boston, New York and Washington. In 1921, Fishta represented Shkodra in the Albanian parliament and was chosen in August of that year as vice-president of this assembly. His talent as an orator served him well in his functions both as a political figure and as a man of the cloth. In later years, he attended Balkan conferences in Athens (1930), Sofia (1931) and Bucharest (1932) before withdrawing from public life to devote his remaining years to the Franciscan order and to his writing. From 1935 to 1938, he held the office of provincial of the Albanian Franciscans. These most fruitful years of his life were now spent in the quiet seclusion of the Franciscan monastery of Gjuhadoll in Shkodra with its cloister, church and rose garden where Fishta would sit in the shade and reflect on his verse.

As the poet laureate of his generation, Gjergj Fishta was honoured with various diplomas, awards and distinctions both at home and abroad. He was awarded the Austro-Hungarian *Ritterkreuz* in 1911, was decorated by Pope Pius XI with the *Al Merito* award in 1925, was given the prestigious *Phoenix* medal of the Greek government, was honoured with the title *Lector jubilatus honoris causae* by the Franciscan order, and was made a regular member of the Italian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1939. He died in Shkodra on 30 December 1940.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Gjergj Fishta was universally recognized as the 'national poet of Albania.' Austrian scholar

Maximilian Lambertz (1882-1963) described him as "the most ingenious poet Albania has ever produced," and Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) sent him greetings as "the great poet of the glorious people of Albania." For others, he was the Albanian Homer.

After World War II, Fishta was nonetheless attacked and denigrated perhaps more than any other prewar writer, and fell into prompt oblivion. The national poet became an anathema. The official Tirana 'History of Albanian Literature' of 1983, which carried the blessing of the Albanian Party of Labour, restricted its treatment of the country's 'national poet' to an absolute minimum:

> "The main representative of this clergy, Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940), poet, publicist, teacher and politician, ran the press of the Franciscan order and directed the cultural and educational activities of this order for a long time. For him, the interests of the church and of religion rose above those of the nation and the people, something he openly declared and defended with all his demagogy and cynicism, [a principle] upon which he based his literary work. His main work, the epic poem, The Highland Lute, while attacking the chauvinism of our northern neighbours, propagates anti-Slavic feelings and makes the struggle against the Ottoman occupants secondary. He raised a hymn to patriarchalism and feudalism, to religious obscurantism and clericalism, and played with patriotic sentiments wherever it was a question of highlighting the events and figures of the national history of our Rilindja period. His other works, such as the satirical poem *'Gomari i Babatasit'* (Babatasi's Ass), in which public schooling and democratic ideas were bitterly attacked, were characteristic of the savage struggle undertaken by the Catholic Church to maintain and increase its influence in the intellectual life of the country. With his art, he endeavoured to pay service to a form close to folklore. This was often accompanied by prolixity, far-fetched effects, rhetoric, brutality of expression and style to the point of vulgarity, false arguments which he intentionally endeavours to impose, and an exceptionally conservative attitude in the field of language. Fishta ended his days as a member of the academy of fascist Italy."

The real reason for Fishta's fall from grace after the 'liberation' in 1944 is to be sought, however, not in his alleged pro-Italian or clerical proclivities, but in the origins of the Albanian Communist Party itself. The ACP, later to be called the Albanian Party of Labour, had been founded during the Second World War under the auspices of the Yugoslav envoys Dušan Mugoša (1914-1973) and Miladin Popović (1910-1945). In July 1946, Albania and Yugoslavia signed a Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance and a

number of other agreements which gave Yugoslavia effective control over all Albanian affairs, including the field of culture. Serbo-Croatian was introduced as a compulsory subject in all Albanian high schools and, by the spring of 1948, plans were even under way for a merger of the two countries. It is no doubt the alleged anti-Slavic sentiments expressed in The Highland Lute which caused the work and its author to be proscribed by the Yugoslav Communist authorities, even though Fishta was educated in Bosnia and inspired by Serbian and Croatian literature. In actual fact, it is as ludicrous to describe The Highland Lute as being anti-Slavic as it would be to describe *El Cid* or the *Chanson de Roland* as being anti-Arab. They are all historical epics with national heroes and foreign foes. In fact, Fishta does not view the Montenegrin Slavs as eternal enemies; rather he sees the hostilities as being a result of interference from the Great Powers, in particular from Russia. It is nonetheless the so-called anti-Slavic element in Fishta's work which was also stressed in the first postwar edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia of Moscow. It reads as follows (March 1950):

> "The literary activities of the Catholic priest Gjergj Fishta reflect the role played by the Catholic clergy in preparing for Italian aggression against Albania. As a former agent of Austro-Hungarian imperialism, Fishta, in the early years of his literary activity, took a position against the Slavic peoples who opposed the rapacious plans of Austro-Hungarian imperialism in Albania. In his chauvinistic, anti-Slavic poem The Highland Lute, this spy extolled the hostility of the Albanians towards the Slavic peoples, calling for an open fight against the Slavs."

After relations with Yugoslavia were broken off in 1948, it is quite likely that expressions of anti-Montenegrin or anti-Serb sentiment would no longer have been considered a major sin in Party thinking. However, an official position had been taken with regard to Fishta and, possibly with deference to the new Slav allies in Moscow, it could not be renounced without a scandal. Gjergj Fishta, who but a few years earlier had been lauded as the national poet of Albania, disappeared from the literary scene, seemingly without a trace. Such was the fear of him that his home was razed to the ground and, in later years, his bones were dug up and secretly thrown into the river.

Yet despite four decades of unrelenting Party harping and propaganda attempting to reduce Fishta to the rank of a minor 'clerical poet,' the people of northern Albania, and in particular the inhabitants of his native Shkodra, did not forget him. After almost half a century of silence, Gjergj Fishta was commemorated openly on 5 January 1991 in Shkodra. During this first public recital of Fishta's works in Albania in forty-five years, the actor at one point

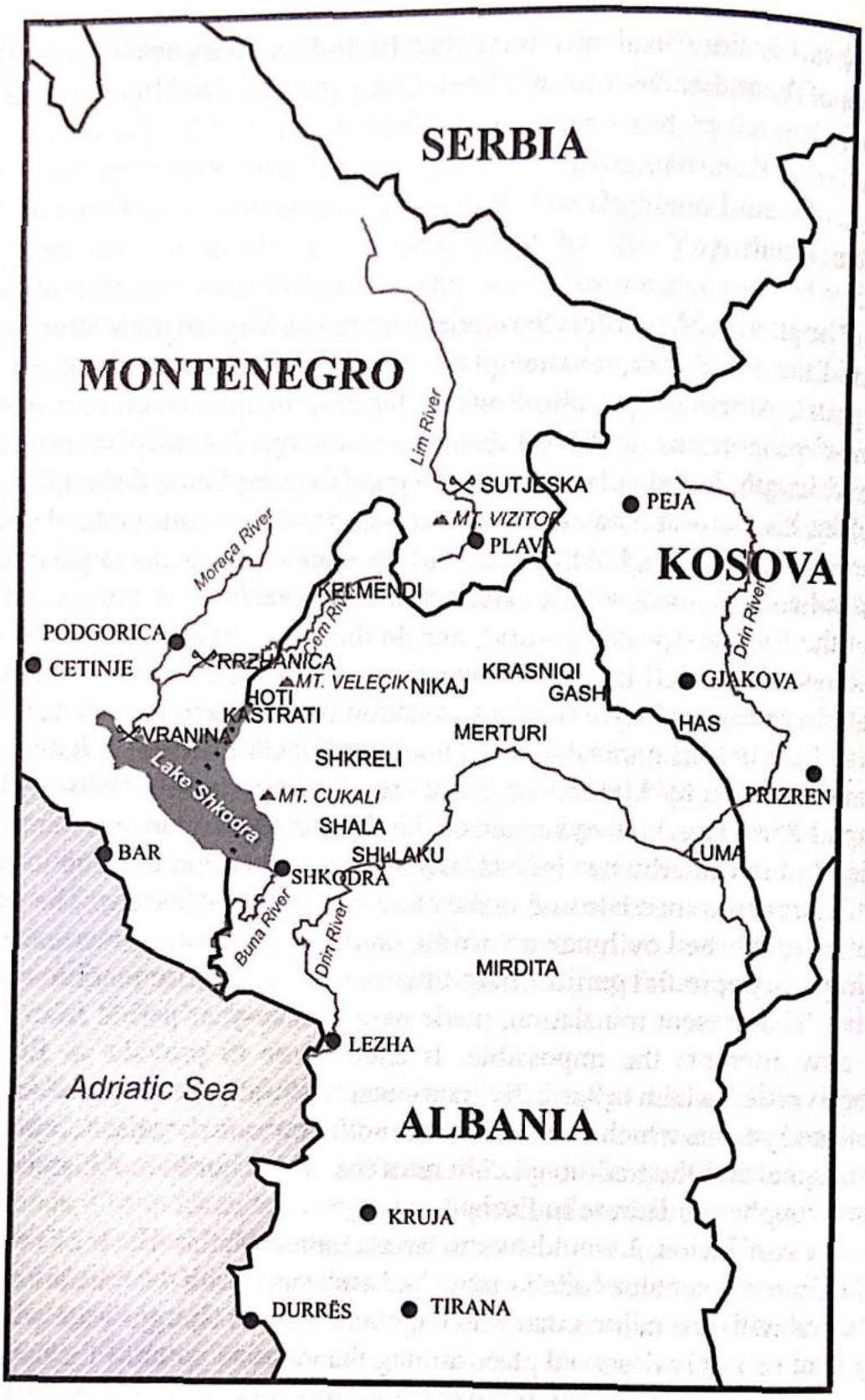
hesitated in his lines, and was immediately and spontaneously assisted by members of the audience - who still knew many parts of The Highland Lute by heart.

The Translation

The present book offers the reader a complete English translation of The Highland Lute. Until now, no attempt has ever been made to translate any part of this grand, Albanian epic into English. Indeed, the translation of a work of such 'epic' proportions presents a daunting challenge, not only because of its scope and length, but also because of the poet's strong Gheg dialect, his rich vocabulary, his many archaic forms of expression and the exotic cultural setting. The heroic culture of High Albania and of the southern Balkans in general has its own values and ideals which cannot be easily translated or transposed into those of the English-speaking world, nor do they have much in common with the cultures of the well-known European epics of centuries past. Finding an adequate language and style for the translation has not been an easy task. The Highland Lute has been translated and published in German and in Italian. The German translation by Maximilian Lambertz, made in the late 1930s with the backing of King Zog, conveys much of the flavour of German epic verse. It is inspiring but not interlinear. Indeed, Lambertz on occasion used up to seven lines of German to translate and make clear one line of Albanian. The Italian translation, published by Ignazio Parrino, on the other hand, is interlinear, but lacks imposing epic flavour. It offers little more than a prose rendition of the narrative. The present translation, made over a three-year period from 2001-2004, now attempts the impossible. It endeavours to provide an English-language version which is basically interlinear, faithful as far as possible to the original, and yet one which strives to mirror both the exalted, majestic, epic style of the original and the traditional culture of the 'wild' northern Albanians, the last surviving heroic culture in Europe.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Janice Mathie-Heck of Calgary, Canada, for her assiduous collaboration and assistance with the translation. It is to be hoped with this edition that The Highland Lute of Gjergj Fishta will now finally take its richly deserved place among the national epics of Europe.

Robert Elsie
Eifel Mountains, Germany
October 2004



Map of the Northern Albanian Highlands
and the Surrounding Region
(Design: Bardh Ismajli)

THE HIGHLAND LUTE

Canto 1

THE BANDITS

In 1862, despite four long centuries under the Turkish yoke, the Albanians have not abandoned their will for freedom. The Tsar of Russia, hoping to extend his influence in the Balkans, writes a letter to his friend, Prince Nikolla (Nicholas I) of Montenegro, suggesting that the latter take possession of a piece of northern Albania to keep the Turks on the defensive, and promising assistance. The letter, borne over hill and dale by the Tsar's personal messenger, arrives at the prince's court inf Cetinje and finds favour with the Montenegrin ruler who convinces the valiant Vulo Radoviqi, commander of Vasoviqi, to ready his bandits to lay waste to Vranina on Lake Shkodra.

Help me God as you once helped me,
Five hundred years are now behind us
Since Albania the fair was taken,
Since the Turks snared and enslaved her,
Left in blood our wretched homeland,
Let her suffocate and wither
That she no more glimpse the sunlight,
That she ever live in sorrow,
That, when beaten, she keep silent.
Mice within the walls wept for her,
Serpents under stones took pity!
As when first a steer's yoked under,
Oxbow weighing hard upon it,
There's no sense at all to prod it,
It will balk, not pull the ploughshare,
Only crisscross fields at fancy,
Furnish trouble for the farmer,
Will refuse to till the furrows
When alone or with another.
So it is with the Albanians,
Under foreign yoke unwilling
To be slaves, pay tithes and taxes.
Always have they wandered freely,
None but God above them knowing,
Never on their lands and pastures
Would they bow before a master,

Never with the Turks agreeing,
Never out of sight their rifles.
They waged war on them, were slaughtered,
Just as if with *shkjas* in battle.
Therefore, when the Turkish *ora*'s
Vigour waned, began to weaken,
When her drive began to crumble,
Russia day by day beset her
And the tribesmen of the Balkans
Newly fled the sultan's power,
Did the Albanians start to ponder
How to free their native country
From the Turkish yoke and make it
As when ruled by Castriota,
When Albanians lived in freedom,
Did not bow or show submission,
To a foreign king or sultan,
Did not pay them tithes and taxes,
And Albania's banner fluttered
Like the wings of all God's angels,
Like the bolts of lightning flashing,
Waving high atop their homeland.
But the Prince of Montenegro,
Prince Nikolla the foolhardy,
Yes, foolhardy, but a nuisance,
Gathered weapons, mustered soldiers
To attack and take Albania,
To subdue the plains and mountains
Down the length of the Drin river,
Right to Rozafat's great fortress,
There to plant his *trobojnica*,
Place on Shkodra his *kapica,*
Make it part of Montenegro,
Leave a bloodbath there behind him.
Still the Turk sat in a stupor,
Teardrops from his eyes a-trickling,
For the *shkjas* he could not counter
Now that Moscow had surrounded
Stamboul and besieged the city.
There the Seven Kings took counsel,
There they talked and pondered evil,
(may their evil thoughts confound them!)

To deliver fair Albania
To the hands of Montenegro.
To their feet rose the Albanians,
Deftly girded on their weapons,
Swore an oath to the Almighty
Like that once sworn by their fathers
In the age of Castriota.
Some with shoes and others barefoot,
Locked their flocks in pen and stockyard,
Some with food and others hungry,
Left their sisters, wives and mothers,
Eyes of flint and hearts gunpowder.
Like a snowstorm in a fury
Did they set on Montenegro.
By the Cem that was the border,
There the heroes brawled in battle,
There Albanian, *shkja* in combat,
Fought and slaughtered one another,
Grappled, wounded, slew each other,
On the ground were heaps of bodies
Left as food for kites and vultures.
Handsome youths lay strewn all over,
All those mountain hawks, those heroes.
Nor did their poor mothers mourn them.
With their suckling bosoms, they
Themselves had spurned the *shkja* invaders.
Once the *shkja* advance was broken,
Did the Albanians hold assembly,
Sent stern message to the sultan
That they'd pay no tithes and taxes,
Neither to that Prince Nikolla
Nor to Stamboul, to the sultan
They'd no longer show submission,
They now wanted independence,
For Albania was not fashioned,
Made by God for the Circassians,
Nor for Turks, for Moors and Asians,
But for mountain hawks, those heroes
Whom the world calls the Albanians,
That they keep it for their children
For as long as life continues.
When the Turk had read the message

He was riled with rage and anger.
How he set upon the land to
Eat them up alive, those tribesmen.
But resolved were the Albanians
That he'd not invade, devour them.
They had come to a decision,
For their land they'd muster courage,
If attacked by king or sultan.
Thus the Turk and the Albanian
Seized each others' throats and strangled,
Smashed each others' skulls to pieces,
Crushed them like so many pumpkins!
Fire broke out then in the Balkans.
Anguished was the *shkja,* Albania,
Freed now of the sultan's power,
Might not fall into his clutches
As he had foreseen the matter.
On the Turk he leapt like lightning,
Like the wild boar with the jackal.
They did haggle and did grapple,
Scuffled, wrestled, bit and murdered,
Rifles volleyed, cannons battered,
Blood in torrents swashed the clearings,
Over fields and through the thickets,
'til at last, midst din and clamour,
Of the Turkish yoke divested,
As she'd yearned for, was Albania,
Free at last, as God had promised.
But no, brothers, do believe me,
Not as Turk or *shkja* would have it.
That the Turk begrudged our freedom's
Understood, but can't fathom
What got into Prince Nikolla,
Forcing to submit Albanians,
Squash them under heel, enslave them,
And to seize that land where once in
Ancient times George Castriota
Brandished in a flash his sabre.
Nor did he show shame or sorrow
That he'd caused the two such bloodshed,
Both Albania and Montenegro.
Moscow gave him heart and courage!

In Petrograd the Tsar of Russia
Took an oath before his people,
To be heard by young and old there,
Not to celebrate a Christmas,
Not to take part as *kumara*
In baptisms or in weddings,
Not to wash his hair or comb it,
Not to take part in assemblies,
Ere he'd entered into Stamboul,
Ere he'd made himself the sultan,
Ruler over land and water,
Blocked off all of Europe's trade routes,
Banning all their sales and buying,
Letting no one start a trade up,
Holding Europe in his power.
Should she even seize a breadcrumb,
She would end up in his clutches,
Captive in his bloodstained talons,
Which were deft at theft and stealing!
But the sly old fox was clever,
Cheater in both words and letters,
One whose falseness had no equal,
He knew well what lay before him,
No light task to enter Stamboul,
No light task subjecting Turkey
Without his own neck in peril.
So he schemed and started plotting,
Poised the Slavs against the Turks, to
Have the Balkan *shkjas* assault them,
Get accounts cleared with the sultan,
Let them first solve all their problems,
Troublemaking and deception,
Then from Russia would he come forth,
Lunging like a bear in ambush,
And attack the Turks like lightning
To eradicate, destroy them,
Never did he once consider
That his deeds might plunge the planet
Altogether into mourning...
When the tsar had ceased his scheming,
Did he return to his chamber,
At his desk he wrote a letter,

Scrawled a note to friends in Serbia,
Friends in Zagreb and in Sofia,
That the *shkjas* should all join up from
Budapest to Çanakkale,
All as one should work together,
Hold at bay the sultan, harried,
Keep him worried and incited,
Day and night they were to hound him
On his roads and at his borders,
Make demands and ultimatums,
That their actions seem haphazard,
Though designed to cause his downfall.
Thereupon, this Slavic scion
Wrote a letter to Cetinje,
To the prince with all the details,
There to spin his web and swindle:
"Greetings to you, Prince Nikolla,
Tidings from the Tsar of Russia,
I've heard of your reputation,
Heard you're quite a daring fellow,
Heard you are a skilful speaker,
Foes, they say, pale at your shadow.
But, it seems, such praise is groundless
For you sit there in Cetinje
On the rocks with half a sandal,
You a laughing stock renowned are,
You bring shame to friends and in-laws,
You go begging, plead for breadcrumbs,
While the Turk who is your neighbour,
On his haughty brow a turban,
Heavy pleats all down his trousers,
He's devoid of care or worry.
If you look, you cannot see him,
Mounds of *pilaf* piled before him.
Say, have you been mutilated?
Or been somewhere earning wages
Or been serving as a farmhand
That of you we've lost all traces?
No, good man, it's not becoming
For the bandit of Cetinje
To remain at home compliant
And help women with their spinning.

Have you never glimpsed Albania,
Seen all those majestic mountains,
Viewed the verdant fields and lowlands?
Have you never ventured out to
Carve yourself a piece of land there?
Why then lounge around and daydream?
If you do not get a move on,
Saint Nich'las and God won't help you.
If you act, luck will be with you,
As the ancient saying has it.
As for rations and for weapons,
Ask me and I'll hand them to you.
Come on, put on your *kapica.*
Should the sultan try to harm you,
I'll not let him touch a feather."
Thus the tsar penned his epistle,
Taking great care, did he fold it,
Creased it and with dark wax seal it,
Passing it to his young herald,
For the Prince of Montenegro.
In his breast the herald placed it,
Limbered up and started running,
Left the plains and dales behind him,
Crossed the lofty mountain pastures,
Forded rivers, mountain torrents,
Travelled over land and water,
'til one day, while running westwards,
Did he finally reach Cetinje,
Tattered jacket, shredded sandals,
Did he give the prince the letter
Which the tsar with wax had sealed.
The prince received it, broke it open,
Took it out and read the letter,
Three times did the prince peruse it,
Three days long he pondered on it.
Thereupon he sent a message,
Summoned Vulo Radoviqi,
Leader of the Vasoviqi,
That he come down to Cetinje,
Notwithstanding roads and weather,
That he fly there like a goshawk,
Down to meet the *gospodari.*

Vulo the Commander, summoned,
Had once been a wily hero,
Earth itself could hardly hold him,
None went raiding there or wrestling
Lest his word be freely given,
Nor was murder 'venged without him,
Nor could maidens ever marry,
Nor was judgment ever taken.
And the Turks of Montenegro,
He was at them like an eagle,
Kept their heads bowed in submission.
Once, this Slavic scion set out
On the road down to Cetinje,
Opened there a woollen blanket,
Stretched it out across the roadway,
Far and wide he told the people
That no Turk of Montenegro
Was to cross it without paying
Toll and poll tax of one ducat.
That was quite a feat of daring,
Made him famed throughout the country.
Vulo's glance was like a windstorm
And his eyes, they flashed with fire,
Thick his eyebrows like an oxbow
Bristling roughly like a boar hide,
Ear to ear his branch-like whiskers,
Like two ravens in a noose snared,
Tall, his head reached to the ceiling.
Such a man, if you had see him,
With his garments, shoes and weapons,
You'd have thought he were a *drangue*,
And the prince did dearly love him,
Loved that Vulo, listened to him
For he was a clever thinker,
Was a man of keen perception.
Therefore did the prince call for him
That he hasten to Cetinje.
Thus came Vulo to Cetinje,
Notwithstanding roads and weather,
Like a goshawk did he fly there.
Vulo, when he reached Cetinje
Warmly by the prince was greeted,

Taken in and paid due honour,
Offered both tobacco, coffee.
Then began the conversation:
"Where've you been, you rascal, Vulo?
Like a lonesome wolf you've vanished,
Never visit in Cetinje
Where you've friends, blood brothers waiting,
Who above all else do love you.
How're you faring, any problems?
How are things in Vasoviqi?"
"You I wish long life, God willing,"
Turned and spoke Commander Vulo,
"This year for us, *gospodari*,
Harvests have not been abundant,
Much bad weather have we suffered
I don't know what now will happen,
How I'll save my farm and family,
For our stocks of food are dwindling."
"Oh, come on," the prince responded,
"Has a bandit ever hungered?
Is a falcon ever meatless?
You can reap a double harvest,
All you need's a bit of booty
To sustain your cows and oxen
And to feed your tribe and village,
Not to mention home and family.
Mark my words, Commander Vulo,
Listen to the *gospodari*,
Find some thugs as mean as serpents,
But as light and swift as goshawks,
Lie in wait among the bushes,
Then go pounce upon Vranina,
Kill and slaughter all you find there,
Burn the houses all to ashes,
Rustle all the spoils around them,
Loot and ransack, pillage, pilfer,
Both by daytime or by nighttime.
This is why I sent the message,
Summoned you here to Cetinje
For I'm once more feeling tempted
With the Turks to start a scuffle,
Fight the Turks and decimate them,

For it seems to me improper
Turks and *shkjas* should tryst together."
So the prince explained the matter,
Did convince him of the details,
Both of them went on discussing
How to act and what they'd need to
Bathe in blood the town Vranina.
When the two had reached a deal, the
Prince invited him for dinner,
And some money did he give him,
With a muzzle-loading flintlock,
Stock of which was silver-coated,
'twas unmatched in Montenegro,
Even on a shelf 'twould scare you,
All the more when with a fighter,
All the more when held by Vulo,
With his teeth he'd bite through iron.
Vulo, to his feet then rising,
Bade farewell to Prince Nikolla
And departed for the mountains.
On his way did Vulo ponder
How to lay waste to Vranina,
As the prince had just requested.

Canto 2

OSO KUKA

Will the Highlanders descend from the mountains to repel the Montenegrin bandits? Avdi Pasha in Shkodra laments that there are no real men left in Albania, and that it has become a land of sissies. Oso Kuka is enraged on hearing this insult and counters that the Albanians have always defended their homeland valiantly and that no sacrifice is too great. Within a week, Oso Kuka himself organizes a band of forty chosen warriors and sets out for Vranina.

Oh God, what said Avdi Pasha:
"Albania has been left with sissies!
Why've no sons, no men been born here,
Now to march down to Vranina,
To Vranina, fatal crossroads,
Where hang useless awesome weapons,
Where such fertile land lies fallow,
Where the barns are without cattle,
Due to Montenegro's bandits?
Our young men have they been killing,
Cows and calves have they been rustling,
Sheep and lambs have they been slaying,
Homes and farms have they been burning,
And the hearts of mothers breaking!
Yes, the prince up in Cetinje
Sent his bandits to Vranina
Killing, slaying all they found there,
Burning houses all to ashes.
Seeking grounds for any skirmish.
Why's the foe bent on assailing
To invade the sultan's realms here,
To invade the land and seize it?
Had I young men in my household,
I'd care not if mothers mourned them,
I'd care not if sisters grieved them,
Poor maids they, bereft of brothers.
I would send them to Vranina
To assault the prince's bandits,

But no son's been born unto me.
I have scoured the land but can't find
Any lad with magic *drangue*
Powers who'd give up his life to
Serve his country, sultan's glory."
Thus the Turkish pasha cried out,
Oso Kuka heard him speaking,
Heard his protest and was angered,
With his rifle belt he set out,
Off to find and shoot the pasha,
But a wise man acts not rashly,
Acts in wisdom not in panic.
Oso therefore let his hand fall,
Put away his awesome rifle,
In the rifle belt he fixed it.
But he could not keep his mouth shut:
"Mind your speech now, Avdi Pasha!
Don't repeat insulting words or
By the holy faith of Allah,
I'll make mourn your wretched mother,
Make her mourn your early passing!
Lads Albania has like *zanas*
Who'd give up their lives and households
For their country and the sultan.
Bound by duty, word of honour,
Should their land or sultan need them,
They'd be first upon the war grounds.
Fearsome fighters, foes attacking,
They're the steel blade of the sabre.
Never having soiled our honour,
Even without skullcaps, footwear,
We'd not fear to seize the booty,
We'd not flinch to snatch high castles
For the sultan, for our country,
For faith, customs, word of honour.
When Albanians enter battle,
They attack like blazing lightning.
From our fathers we were heir to
Weapons and our word of honour.
What? No lads with *drangue* powers,
Who'd give up their lives and households
Should Albania or sultan need them?

You claim you searched, could not find them?
It's not your fault, ill-repute has
Cast dishonour on Albania
Since the Turkish pashas came here.
Once the Albanian, he stood upright,
Now he cowers before strangers,
Not the way our fathers taught us...
But let's change the subject matter.
I'll push off now for Vranina,
Off to stop the prince's bandits.
Forty men, I beg you, give me,
Forty men, all lads light-footed,
There to fight and die in combat.
Only here you'll find such heroes
And I swear my pledge of honour,
If I'm not felled by gunpowder,
Vranina won't be abandoned."
Thereupon rose Avdi Pasha,
Turned and shook the hand of Oso.
"Bravo, good man, Oso Kuka,
When you speak such words, I know I
Hear the mountain hawk within you.
Choose your men, the finest fighters,
Set off for that barren hillside,
For Vranina where sad mothers
Bury their young sons, bewail them,
Where brides go back to their parents,
There they wait for you, their saviour."
Spoke the pasha. One week later
Rose the sun o'er Mount Cukali,
Shining over shame eternal
Where injustice reigned undaunted.
Small but brave was Oso's *çeta*
Over Qafa e Kalás climbing,
As they marched down to Vranina,
Forty lads, select and chosen
From the Highlands and the lowlands,
Not for wealth or for appearance,
But for heartiness and courage.
Oso Kuka was their leader,
Oso Kuka, bolt of lightning
From the heavens, has no equal.

See him striding down the roadway,
All bow to him, long life wishing.
See his great and awesome flintlock
Flashing as it drapes his shoulder,
Lightning in a siege at nighttime,
In his belt a nest of vipers,
At his sides are his two pistols,
Dreaded sisters of his sabre,
Hanging ominous between them.
With his garments, boots and weapons,
Eagle-eyed, of giant stature,
Oso Kuka strode to market
In his gold-embroidered waistcoat.
Death's grim sabre was behind him,
Soko Tona of Guri i Lekës,
Soko Tona, like the Valbona,
Fame that echoes in our mountains.
Famed for food his guests are offered,
Famed for arms and word of honour.
They say he received three medals,
Won three medals and citations,
To the sultan service rendered
On the two sides of the ocean.
Next in line, a hero's son was
Taro Pllumi of Jegumiri.
Then two fearsome storm clouds followed,
Two young men come from Zagorja,
Kaçel Doda, Kerrni Gila,
Both, same age, like flintstone muskets.
Yet, good Oso, bolt of lightning,
Two young maids are going to curse you,
Curse you will two mothers' daughters,
In the shade there at the farmhouse,
When they hear, two withered tree stumps,
That you've chosen their young husbands
For the war with Montenegro.
Do you know that dark-haired fellow?
Forehead like a copper platter,
Storm clouds in his eyes reflecting,
Like a bear his sturdy shoulders.
Son of Mar Kolë Dini, Çoku
From Kabash in Dukagjini,

Fearsome hero like a *zana,*
Dead his father, dead his mother,
Nary a boulder he'd not fracture.
Behind them is another *çeta*,
Some are younger, some are older,
All united in their courage,
In their bravery and their bounty.
As for beauty and appearance
First in rank are Jup Qehaja,
Galo Keqi, Sinanaja,
Vuksan Gjeli, Met Zeneli,
First among them, like the day-star,
Preng Markola from Mirdita,
He's renowned in combat, counsel,
Known from Shkodra to Peshkopia.
With their garments, boots and weapons,
As to celebrate a wedding,
One by one they strode to market,
Like the rain clouds from Tivari,
Looming dark upon our mountains,
Ready now to break with showers.
Soon they reached the Buna river,
Found a skiff there waiting for them,
All embarked and took their places,
Gliding forth with sails unfurling,
Sailing swiftly as the clouds do,
On the lake the waves were curling,
Breaking as they neared Vranina
Where Cetinje's thugs lay waiting.

Canto 3

THE BOOTY

In a pasture near Vranina, Vulo Radoviqi slays the Albanian shepherd Avdi Hisa and takes his herd as booty. Avdi's sister bemoans the death of her brother with a lament in Highland tradition. Hearing her wails, Oso Kuka summons his warriors to take revenge. They catch up with the cattle thieves on the banks of the Moraça and retake the herd in pitched battle. The Slavs lose two of their men and the Albanians prepare to withdraw, satisfied at having avenged the blood of Avdi two to one. On their way back, Oso Kuka discovers that one of his warriors, Kerrni Gila of Zagorja, is missing. He returns to see Kerrni Gila locked in a gruesome fight with the Montenegrin warrior Jovani. Oso Kuka separates the warriors and spare's Jovani's life, sending him home to "tell your young bride and young mother... you were born a second time here."

Who can tell me why the cuckoo,
Bird of our misfortune's grieving,
Why's it more than ever keening
In Vranina, land of mishap,
On that hill above the lakeside?
Is it mourning its own problems,
Is its life so full of sorrow,
Has it not had sons and daughters?
It does not lament its own loss,
Mourns not missing sons and daughters.
It's lamenting for a sister
Who at home has lost her brother.
Snuffed out was today a household,
Avdi's sister is in mourning!
Avdi Hisa, yes, was slaughtered
As he rested in the shadows
Of two trees on mount Vranina.
Vulo, Slavic scion, slew him,
Hero he with *drangue* powers,
Plaguing, vexing all Vranina,
Leaving not one horse to gallop,
Leaving not one maid to marry,
Since the young lads does he slaughter,
Send their brides back to their fathers,

Swathe in black their mourning mothers.
He, the Slavic scion, set off
With Cetinje's thirteen bandits
To invade Vranina's meadows
Have his fill of tasty goat meat.
There did he reach Avdi's meadow,
Avdi shouted swiftly to him:
"Go no farther, whiskered Vulo,
Go no farther in those sandals.
My red goats I'll not abandon
Without bloodshed in the meadow.
I don't herd for Montenegro!"
Then he seized his black *breshana*
Which he loved like mother, sister,
Grasped and aimed, about to fire it,
But God's plan for him was different.
In his hand fired the *breshana*
Far too early and betrayed him.
Mad with rage reacted Vulo,
Seized and aimed his flintlock musket,
With the musket did he shoot him,
To the ground fell Avdi slaughtered,
Ran forth to profane the body,
Something custom does forbid him.
There he stripped him of his waistcoat,
There he took from him his sabre,
And removed the lengthy rifle,
As a real man would not dare to.
Then he led away the goat herd
Drove it over fields and wasteland.
Hard-pressed is Vranina's he-goat,
Driven by Cetinje's bandit.
Loudly weeps a Muslim's daughter,
Loudly sobbing and lamenting,
Glimpsing on his bier her brother:
"When came out the morning sunlight,
Oh, my brother, oh!
O'er the hills of Podgorica,
Oh, my brother, oh!
O'er your shoulder hung your rifle,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Then you strode down to the goat pen,

Oh, my brother, oh!
There you called out to the he-goat:
Oh, my brother, oh!
'Lead the herd down to the meadows,'
Oh, my brother, oh!
'Water them at the Moraça,'
Oh, my brother, oh!
'Rest them at that tree, shade-giving,'
Oh, my brother, oh!
Your poor sister searches for you,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Like a tree with golden branches,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Like a tree whose crown is blooming,
Oh, my brother, oh!"
There the poor maid sat and pondered:
"Oh, my brother, oh!
Wonder what girl you'd have married,
Oh, my brother, oh!
"Vulo now, with *drangue* powers,
Oh, my brother, oh!
To this sombre soil has wed you,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Your arms, garments here abandoned,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Mother and your sister mourning,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Veiled in black do they bewail you,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Mother, sister seeking comfort,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Wait for your return no longer,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Now there is a black bird singing,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Over Albania is it winging,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Never have I heard it happen,
Oh, my brother, oh!
That blood's gone inexpiated,
Oh, my brother, oh!
Be it severed head or money,

Oh, my brother, oh!
Unavenged's the blood of Avdi,
Oh, my brother, oh!
I am Avdi's wretched sister!"
So the Muslim mourned her brother,
And the lake, Vranina, heard her,
Oso Kuka, too, he heard her.
Listening, to his feet he hastened:
"Eat up, lads. May your food kill you,
May the sultan's food dispatch you,
May you drink but ocean water
If Avdi's blood's not atoned for,
Not restored Albania's honour.
Rise up, Soko, we can halt them.
With our goats we'll feed no bandits,
Not disgraced will be our maidens."
Look how to their feet they hastened,
Some with boots and others barefoot,
Rose and seized Albanian weapons,
Guns Italian, muzzle flintlocks,
Others bore renowned *breshanas,*
And they girded on their sabres,
In their belts they placed their pistols,
How Vranina now did echo!
Like a hive poked by a jostler,
When chased from their nest, like hornets,
So they swarmed out of their barracks,
Oso's lads and stormed the flat lands,
Where amidst the din and clamour
Avdi's sister sat lamenting.
Charged the fighters, running fleetly,
No one waiting for his comrade,
Like a race in which the fastest
Wins a gown of woven fabric,
Unaware that death awaits him.
None of them sensed any peril
As they chased the foe before them,
All their hearts were yearning only
For their heels to wing more swiftly.
From their eyes the sparks were flashing,
Grim and frightful like the storm winds
As they roared down through the valleys,

Shooting forth in all directions,
Bearing their Albanian rifles,
Ever flashing through the country,
Like a night with bolts of lightning,
Like the barking hounds a-hunting
Erring tireless o'er the mountains,
Onwards 'til they sniff the game out.
Like them were the lads of Oso,
Save that they pursued the bandits,
No wood grove would crack and crackle
More if in it fire were raging
Than does now engulf Vranina
With Albanian fighters' light feet
Rushing up and down the hills as
If their feet on wings were flying.
Shots rang out now from a flintlock
In the reeds at the Moraça,
By the banks towards Bjelopole.
Preng Markola's rifle echoed,
Preng Markola from Mirdita,
Like a day-star 'mongst his comrades.
He was first to spot the bandits,
As they fled towards Ponari.
"Hey, slow down, you Slavic scion,
You'll not steal herds from Vranina,
Though you be prince of Cetinje!"
So called Prenga out to Mirko,
Aimed his muzzle-loading flintlock,
Shot the rifle, salvo echoed,
Guns Italian, muzzle flintlocks,
Others fired in storm *breshanas,*
Making suckling infants tremble.
Whene'er fighters do assemble
On the war grounds of the *zanas,*
When their rifles brawl, oh brother,
They leave rarely without bloodshed.
Here was slaughtered Pavloviqi,
Fell at first shot, Pavloviqi,
Driving goats across the cornfields.
Vulo, when he saw his friend fall,
Knew the field was not the right place
For a duel, goats abandoned,

For the riverbank he made off.
"On to battle, men," cried Oso,
Roaring loudly like a lion,
With his fighters, a projectile,
Hurled himself in fury at them.
Have you ever seen what happens
When the falcon comes down swooping,
Seen the hens hide in the bushes?
Thus the bandits ran for cover,
All the bandits fled like arrows,
Some ran down and others upwards.
Vulo tucked his robes up, sprinting
Swiftly as his legs would take him,
Once a hero, let's bewail him.
But why bother, luck's not with him.
Taro slaughtered his companion,
Taro Pllumi of Jegumiri,
In the nape he caught and killed him,
Slew a young man from Zaçiri,
Left him lying in the fern leaves.
Oh, good *zana*, speak and tell me,
Where has Oso left the lad now,
Where's he left that Kerrni Gila
Always with his flintlock musket?
Tell me, was his age decisive,
Knowing that a heart was beating
Back home for him in his household,
Did life pity him and hide him,
Give him cover in the bushes?
Kerrni Gila from Zagorja
Like a storm cloud, took no cover.
No, he crossed paths with Jovani
On the banks of the Moraça.
Jovani tried to avoid him,
Fleeing, but his shinbone stopped him
And he fell behind his comrades
Who in rapid strides had vanished.
"Hurrah," roared the wolf behind him,
Kerrni tearing through the rushes,
Through the reeds and marshy water,
Aiming with his flintlock musket,
Shot at him, but not to hit him,

For he sought to seize him living.
But the lad would not be captured
For he was a mountain falcon,
Was a *shkja* with three hearts in him.
At his heels, Kerrni behind him
Cast his rifle in the brambles,
Brandishing his awesome sabre,
Source of grief for many mothers.
To the young lad from Zagorja
Did Jovani turn, demanding:
"Don't be duped, boy, into thinking
I'll dishonour Montenegro
And give up like some old woman.
If you're armed and are Albanian,
Have a scrap of noble bearing,
Draw your sabre, if you're able,
Chop my head off in a duel."
Kerrni did not hesitate and,
Ready for the duel, cried out:
"Both with sabre and long rifle
I'm Albanian and a master,
How could Montenegro's bandits
Teach me what are faith and courage?
But perhaps of life you weary
With your evil deeds and thieving.
Now has come your fatal hour
Sure as I'm called Kerrni Gila."
From its sheath he drew his sabre,
Shining, flashing in the sunlight,
On the ground he lay his rifle,
Face to face to meet Jovani.
"Oh Albanian, for some time now
You've betrayed faith and tradition,
Striking from behind your foes, so
Come and see my steel sword glisten."
Kerrni Gila and Jovani,
See them striding to the war grounds!
Face to face the two foes stood there,
Sabres clashed, crossed one another,
Met like tinder and gunpowder.
God in heaven, be our witness,
How they set upon each other,

Like two bolts of lightning flashing,
Sparks burst, flying up between them,
Like a hot iron on an anvil.
Through the air swooped both their sabres
As they flew at one another,
Sweat and blood in streams were flowing,
Neither of the men grew weaker,
All the more their rage was fuelled.
Like a mountain bear when wounded
By a gunshot or a bear trap,
And undaunted by the torment,
All the more 'twill vent its fury,
And assault in blinded rage the
Bloodied weapon that did wound it.
Thus the two foes met and grappled,
Deft their hands in nimble movement
Struck the foe like bolts of lightning,
With new strength and might assaulting,
Snorting, fuming did they battle,
From their mouths foam spewed, blood spurted,
When abruptly on that flat land
Turned up thund'rous Oso Kuka,
He was on his journey homewards,
Goats and two captives were with him,
Whom he'd wrenched from Montenegro.
Kerrni seeing Oso coming,
Blushed in shame before the hero
That he'd not slain his opponent.
Thus, he raised his sharpened sabre
With such fury, lunging at him,
Such that he'd have slain the bandit,
Sliced him up, if he had hit him.
But a long life had the bandit,
Held the blow back with his sabre,
Saved himself thus from extinction.
When the sabres clashed, resounding,
All of poor Vranina thundered.
Split in twain did the two sabres
Like two withered oak tree branches.
"I am neutral," Oso Kuka
Shouted and then sprang between them,
Pounced between the foes to part them,

For they had begun to wrestle.
"Enough, oh fighters, have you battled,
For it thus has not been written,"
Bellowed Oso to them saying:
"It has not been written for you
That you let each other perish.
Go now, Montenegrin bandit,
Rise and, to your home returning,
Tell your young bride and your mother
Should you have such on this planet,
You were born a second time here,
To you now your life we've granted,
For you seem of noble bearing.
Pass this message to your comrades:
Do not let that tsar deceive you,
Saying Nikolla will reign here,
While reside men in Albania.
Disputes, discord may befall us,
But when we're called by the sultan,
Or when *shkjas* invade our country,
Heed me, lad, hear what I'm saying,
All Albanians'll be united
In one cause, Christians and Muslims."
Thus spoke Oso, and Jovani
Did not wait a second longer,
Once his wounds were bound and treated,
Fetched his rifle, uphill fleeing.
Lucky for you, oh, you rascal,
That your sabre shattered early.
He departed for Cetinje,
Oso headed for Vranina,
Sang the *zana* in Vranina:
"Ne'er there'll be another Oso
Born of beys or tribal chieftains
Where the sun sets and the moon glows!"

Canto 4

VRANINA

The figure of Oso Kuka is described in detail. He is a hero of supernatural powers and is dreaded by Prince Nikolla. The prince assembles the commanders of his army and tells them of his plans. Two hundred warriors are to be sent to the island of Vranina in Lake Shkodra. His counsellor Captain Mirko advises him to sow the seeds of discord among the Albanians as a means of overcoming them. The poet calls upon the *zana*, mountain spirit and muse, to warn Oso Kuka of the impending attack.

Rumours spread throughout Cetinje:
What has happened in Vranina,
What has happened to the *shkjas* there?
Taken captive, households slaughtered,
Slaughtered households, bandits captured
Since he turned up, Oso Kuka!
Oso Kuka, man from Shkodra,
Left in Shkodra none his equal,
None in keeping faith and courage,
As is custom in Albania.
Hairy man with eyes all bloodshot,
Whiskers drooping to his gun belt,
When he speaks, the mountains echo,
When he calls, the flat lands tremble,
When he seizes his grim sabre,
Such the whizz when it is brandished,
Lightning you'd think flashed beside you!
With his muzzle-loading flintlock,
With that flintlock, killer rifle,
He can shoot at the horizons,
Aim and take a falcon's eye out.
Strong and spry, brave as a *zana*,
With a lucky star his mother
Birthed a *drangue*, thus she bore him,
Since three hearts did beat inside him,
Since three golden feathers fluttered
Underneath his mighty shoulders.
Therefore bullets could not wound him,

Nor could sabres ever slay him,
Cannonballs could not destroy him.
He had set upon Vranina
With one hundred one *breshanas*.
There he bade his fighters, saying:
"While the Albanian race is living,
Yield not to the *gospodari*."
Prince Nikolla heard the order,
And was sorely angered by it,
Angered at the words he heard and
Summoned Montenegro's chieftains,
One a bear, another windstorm,
All were born like mountain falcons,
There they lined up in the meadows.
Eyebrows frowning on his forehead,
Spoke the prince, full loudly fuming:
"In Cetinje rumour has it
That from Shkodra's come a fellow
To Vranina, to that hillside,
They report, it's Oso Kuka,
Long black hair adorns him, hirsute,
Blood and fire in his eyeballs,
And he has a pair of whiskers,
Such a pair so curly twining,
Drooping right down to his gun belt,
Dark and thick as are his biceps.
They say he was born a *drangue*,
Neither guns or cannons harm him,
Nor can sabres ever slay him.
They say with two hundred comrades
He's descended on Vranina,
With two hundred youthful fighters,
Chosen men from high and lowlands,
Hand-picked not for their appearance
But for valour and their courage,
Yes, their rifles are their parents.
There he told his fighters, saying:
'While the Albanian race is living,
We'll not yield to the *gospodari*,'
And they say that Oso Kuka's
Captured, seized some of my bandits,
Some he's taken, some he's slaughtered,

Won't let *shkjas* into that country.
I myself had sent the bandits
Out to capture poor Vranina,
There to pillage and to plunder,
With the Turks to take up battle,
For it's Moscow that did order
Us to set off for Albania,
Taking Rozafat, Deçani,
Marching on the Serbians' border,
That our country, Montenegro,
Vie with Serbia as an equal.
Seems to me a good idea.
What's left of it, of Albania'll
Go to Greece and to Bulgaria,
For when Slavs throughout the Balkans
All the sultan's lands have seized here,
When they've occupied the harbours,
When they've formed a pact among them,
They will build a bridge uniting
All Slavonic lands together,
'twixt the seas extending Moscow,
Crushing all the other kingdoms.
Now, however, to Vranina's
Come that fellow who's from Shkodra.
I don't know what's going to happen,
But I fear there's no solution,
No way I can nab Albania,
As the tsar suggested to me."
Montenegro's prince had spoken,
And the chieftains hearkened to him,
They had listened and considered
Everything the prince had told them
Of Albania and its people.
Then spoke Mirko, mighty chieftain,
To the prince said: "*Gospodari,*
The tsar's petition will be answered
Even though that man from Shkodra's
In Vranina, that poor region,
On that hill and at the lakeside.
For this man called Oso Kuka,
If he is a human being,
Though a normal gun can't kill him,
(Would I could but hunt and fell him!),
You will need a killer rifle,

Italian weapon of my father,
Fearsome and it's never shamed me,
For 'twas proved on foe from Turkey.
Let's suppose that, dead or living,
We can't catch that man from Shkodra,
This alone will be no hindrance
Bringing under sway Albania.
Every Montenegrin knows
Albanian lads are fierce like *zanas*,
Stronger men has birthed no mother.
We say they are born with weapons,
Known are they around the globe for
Courage, faith and word of honour.
Therefore will, my Lord, Albania
Not collapse from one day's effort.
But with time and with deception
Montenegro can defeat her,
And our Serb frontier we'll make
Deçani's church and Kruja's tekke.
For indeed throughout Albania
Have come colonists to settle,
Immigrants and Orientals,
Folk bereft of kin and household,
They are men who know no leader,
Gold is God and Sultan to them,
They've rebuffed the noble houses,
Noble houses of Albania,
All those chieftains, all those captains,
Standard-bearers brave as *zanas,*
Who'd have perished for the sultan,
Who'd have died there for their homeland.
By my word now, show your money
And you'll conquer all Albania,
Seize it long before you know it.
Let us sow thus, gospodari,
Seeds of discord 'mong the Albanians,
For with time and with deception,
You'll be king of all Albania
And perchance indeed of Serbia.
Let's not sit around and dither,
Hasten to Vranina thither,
Battle with that Turk from Shkodra.

I will lead those from Cetinje,
Seven hundred Cetinje fighters,
On their lives they place no value,
Die in bed or on the war grounds.
Have Gjukoviq Pera come and
Bring four hundred other rifles,
Men, four hundred, from Bijoca
Who are Montenegro's *oras*.
I have faith that with these *çetas*,
When I reach Vranina's hillside,
I will plant the *trobojnica*,
Place on Oso our *kapica*,
If it's true no sword can kill him,
As is rumoured in Cetinje.
Otherwise his head I'll bring back
To Cetinje on a pole stick."
Captain Mirko thus did speak out,
No one dared to contradict him.
Then the prince of Montenegro
Rose and hollered: "Oh my falcons,
Send the army to Vranina!
Send there countless youthful soldiers,
Seize and take Vranina for me,
Chop the head off Oso Kuka!
As to scheming and deception,
Simply leave the matter to me,
For with guile and with some money
I can break up son and father,
Not to mention tribes and families,
Which for as long as I remember
Never lived in peace together.
Now I've hope and expectation
That Serbia and Montenegro
Will at last join in alliance
Both with Greece and with Bulgaria,
As it was resolved in Moscow.
Seize and take Vranina for me,
Chop the head off Oso Kuka!"
Thus the prince spoke, chiefs departed.
On Vranina's powder tower
Did a crow land, started cawing:
"Oh, good *zana*, by the fountain,

By the brooks and by the torrents,
By the nightingales *in springtime,*
And by summer's gentle breezes,
By the dew sent from the heavens,
By the roses and the flowers,
Tell me, *zana,* are you worried
That the prince his men commanded
To send forces to Vranina,
Oso Kuka's head to sever?
May my wings and feathers wither,
May the groves be felled, uprooted,
May all song and dance be stifled,
Music, motion, human feelings
On the grassy upland meadows.
May it fracture, my *lahuta*,
If I show a sign of pity
When they come beheading Oso,
When his eyes, grown dark, are gouged out.
May they slay Albania's chieftains
If there is a man who's able
To set on them the *kapica*
With the 'N' that means Nikita.
Alas, my heart and soul are weary,
Quiv'ring head to toe my body,
For I sense impending havoc
Which now Montenegro's planning,
To destroy our poor Albania.
Where were born, which cradle rocked the
Men who set the world on fire?
Where now Pyrrhus, Alexander
Whom the world feared, Castriota?
Dazed, dumbfounded the Albanians
Staring blankly, lounge around. You'd
Think the heavens had commanded
Them to serve the *shkjas* in bondage,
And the prince to rule Albania,
Which their fathers lost their lives for.
Oh, be damned, men of Albania,
Young and old, a curse upon you!
If you don't wield lethal weapons
For the sultan, for your freedom,
And swear sacred oaths among you

Life and limb to give up and to
Die in sacrifice, before you
Let Albania's folk fall victim
To the *gospodari*'s hunger.
What? You think songs will be sung out
Of them sitting without arms, of
How the prince did pluck Albania,
Land of *besa* and of courage?
No, by God. The earth will rather
Swallow all its hills and mountains,
All its rivers and broad meadows,
For it, sun and moon will languish!
Oh, you leaders of our country,
Oh, you chieftains of the Highlands,
By the Lord and by your honour,
Do not covet foreign money.
For, though late, comes retribution,
On your sons will be passed judgment.
You, whom the Divine has chosen,
Has selected to be leaders
Of men on the road to Heaven,
Mirror of justice and of freedom,
Keep in mind your sacred duty's
More than simply milking sheep and
Learning foreign tongues but rather,
Cherishing our faith from heaven,
Treasuring the gospels' teachings,
Kindling love in the Albanians
For their language and their country,
That Albania keep its freedom,
That the Albanians serve the sultan,
Ready life and limb to offer
To the sultan and their homeland
And to die like Oso Kuka
Who's expiring on that hillside!"

Canto 5

DEATH

Oso Kuka has a dream. At a meal with his men, he asks Soko Tona, gifted in the art of prophesy, to foretell the future. From the shoulder blade of a slaughtered beast, Soko Tona augurs graves, smoke and blood. Kaçeli picks up the *lahuta* and sings the famed song of Gjergj Elez Alia and the sea monster. Oso Kuka is worried and sends sentries to guard the banks of the river. Among the sentries, however, is a traitor, Zeliq Gjuka, who leads the Montenegrins across the ford at night. In the ensuing battle, the Albanian warriors are vanquished. Thirty are slain and ten wounded. Among the survivors is Oso Kuka who with his remaining men takes refuge in a *xhebehâne*, a fortified powder depot. The Montenegrins attack and Oso Kuka, rather than surrender to the enemy, blows up the tower, killing himself, his wounded comrades and the attackers. As the poet bestows his blessing on Oko Kuka, the Montenegrin flag is hoisted over Vranina.

What's got into Oso Kuka?
He's not hunger for his food and
Left uneaten bread and ram meat.
On the floor beside the table,
Sitting there, he twirls his whiskers.
They say he'd a dreadful nightmare,
From a nightmare seemed to suffer
In the night before while sleeping.
In his dreams he saw Death's shadow
Which had set out from Rijeka,
Spewing flames as vampires spew them
As it crossed the plains and hillsides,
As it strode through marsh and gravel,
Ever onwards to Vranina.
When it finally reached Vranina,
In the tower did it hole up,
Setting fire there to the powder.
When it set fire to the powder,
Did the tower burst and thunder,
Underfoot the earth did shudder,
River, lake and mountain echoed.
Oso wakened from his slumber.

Oso Kuka had that nightmare,
Thus for food he had no hunger,
Left uneaten bread and ram meat.
On the floor beside the table
Did he sit as if he'd eaten,
Washed his hands and to one side rose,
Shifted, leaned against the chimney,
Pensive as he smoked tobacco.
Oso stood there thinking deeply
As the young men finished dinner,
Folded, put away the tables,
'round the room then took their places.
Some were carving, others talking,
Some played *cicmic,* some played *hane*,
Oiled the cocks of their *breshanas*,
One ground on a stone his sabre,
One was counting all his bullets.
Later Oso turned and uttered:
"Take that shoulder bone and tell us,
Soko Tona, what it augurs,
For there's something that's disturbed me."
Evil did portend the shoulder,
At one end it spoke of warfare,
On the blade were graves apparent,
Smoke and blood were in the courtyards.
Soko frowned and then fell silent,
Holding it against the sunlight.
"Perhaps the shoulder bone says nothing.
If it does, it would seem likely
That a war is coming at us,
In it many men will perish,
I can see here many tombstones..."
But Albanians fear no warfare.
"Take, Kaçeli, the *lahuta*,
Sing a native song out for us,
We'll not mourn until they've killed us!"
Kaçeli took up the *lahuta*,
Put the bridge on it in order.
With his voice Kaçeli tuned it,
Turned to them and started singing:
"From the sea emerged a *harap*,
Evil hero and pugnacious,

He demanded heavy tribute:
Three full wheat cakes from each household,
Seven measures' wine for drinking,
Steer and calf to fill his belly,
That a ram for lunch be roasted,
And a he-goat for his dinner.
Slew a hundred men in battle,
Emptying a hundred sheep folds,
Burning down a hundred houses.
When the turn came for Albania,
Did he write a blackguard letter
Bound for Gjergj Elez Alia:
"Listen, Gjergj Elez Alia,
In two weeks, when you this letter
Get, you meet me on the war grounds
Or I'll burn your stony towers
And I'll trample hills and pastures
And I'll milk your sheep and goats and
Then I'll take your wife my prisoner!"
Gjergj, when he had read the letter,
Was indignant, full of anger,
Wrathful as he read the letter.
Two long weeks he got his strength up,
Eating bread from fallow pastures,
Meat from steers he gorged on, gobbled,
Wines, three-years-old, did he gulp down,
And he fattened up his courser,
Filled as feed with rice the nosebag,
Gave it wine instead of water.
When two weeks had come and passed did
Gjergj arise to try his strength out
On the great oak in the courtyard.
With his hands did Gjergj now seize it,
Tore it free with all the roots on,
Put it back where he had found it.
Gjergj then donned his boots and clothing,
Dressed himself in golden garments,
Girded on a gilded sabre,
Went and feetched his dappled courser,
On its reins were studs three hundred,
Harnessed it with seven belt straps.
Then he cried out to his mother:

"Mother, will you please forgive me
For harsh words we might have spoken."
Then her hand he kissed and added:
"One request I have now, mother.
Should fate let the *harap* slay me,
Do not weep for me or mourn me!"
"Go, my son, may God be with you,
Never will your mother shame you."
With him did he take his cudgel
And he mounted on his courser,
Cant'ring off along the hillside.
As the sun came out that morning,
Did he reach the *harap*'s doorway.
"Greetings to you, swarthy *harap*,
You've no time to sit around now,
Rise and come out to the war grounds,
It's been two weeks since you dared me,
Now I've come to chop your head off."
When the sea *harap* espied him
At the doorway, Gjergj Alia,
How is it that he reacted?
Covered he his steed with cowhides,
Gjergj's courser balked, was frightened,
And from Gjergj it sought protection.
"Have no fear, horse, sired by stallion,
Hides are lifeless, cannot hurt you."
At him lunged the swarthy *harap*
And did hurl a mighty cudgel,
Gjergj then ducked and dodged the cudgel,
Let it streak past like an arrow.
Gjergj Elez Alia uttered:
"Careful now, you swarthy *harap*,
My name's Gjergj Elez Alia."
And he hurled his cudgel at him,
Striking him between the shoulders,
Flinging him three paces forwards,
To the earth fell dead the *harap*.
Gjergj the fighter stopped, dismounting,
And he chopped the swarthy head off.
What a monster God had fashioned!
Three full hands in width his lips were,
Ears, as long as human garments,

Large, two men could hide inside them.
Sulejman the Sultan heard this,
Made a royal proclamation:
'round the world there may be heroes,
But none equal the Albanians,
Not in Christian, Muslim kingdoms,
Nor on land or sea you'll find them.'"
Thus the song that sang Kaçeli.
All within the room had heard and
All had watched Kaçeli singing,
Save for Oso, *drangue* hero.
To the song he did not listen,
Nor that night did music please him.
Thus he did not thank Kaçeli,
Saying "May your heart sing" to him,
He just turned to Met Zeneli:
"Take Vuksani and Sinani,
Kerrni of Zagorja with you,
Go down to the ford, keep watch there,
For it is now close to midnight,
And the *shkjas* can be deceitful."
Thus spoke Oso. They departed,
Oso and the lads retiring.
In his bed slept Oso Kuka.
Zeliq Gjuka was not sleeping,
Wasting not his time in slumber,
It would seem he's up to something,
For he set out somewhere early,
Veiling in a cloak his body.
Oh, good *zana*, can you tell me,
What is Zeliq Gjuka up to
As he nears the ford in darkness,
Pacing swiftly on his way there?
Zeliq Gjuka, Slavic fighter,
Slavic fighter from Vranina's
Making haste to reach Prevlaka,
There to meet up with one Mirko.
Mirko, man of Montenegro's
Mustered there a massive army,
And intends to nab Vranina
In the dark and moonless nighttime.
Thus to Gjuka he sent word to

Take the army to that hillside.
Gjuka followed up the order
And, before the first cocks' crowing,
Met with Mirko, the Commander.
Mirko teamed up with the traitor,
Paid him well, did the Commander,
But I think, 'twas ill-considered,
For in armies, heads come cheaply.
When the Pleiades went under,
To their feet did spring the soldiers,
Rose and stormed off for Vranina,
Cetinje's seven hundred rifles,
Men whom Mirko had brought with him,
Row on row from Cernojeviq
'long the banks of the Rijeka,
Filed like natives, followed Zeliq,
With four hundred other fighters
Gjukoviq Pera'd assembled.
With skiffs onwards from Rijeka
Did they sail to Çakavica,
Off to ravage poor Vranina,
In that region near Lesendra.
Oh, dear *zana*, by my eyesight,
Go to Oso's head, I beg you,
Whisper in his ear and tell him
That the Prince will soon besiege him,
Both by land and from the water,
Planning there to chop his head off!
Wait a moment, he's not sleeping,
Oso sent four of his watchmen
To the ford to guard the river.
Should all Russia have invaded,
They'd not fail to fight and warn him,
For held guard there Met Zeneli,
Met Zeneli, Vuksan Gjeli
And Sinani from Zagorja.
There the plains began to thunder,
Underfoot the earth did quiver.
At that moment rose the day-star
Bringing new hope to the planet,
Bringing, though, for poor Albania
Moans and sighs and new disasters,

For when Mirko reached the ford there,
Did the watchmen not espy him?
No, the watchmen were not slumb'ring,
They lay ready there in ambush
On the *shkja* to open fire
Just as he was in their gun range.
When the men reached the Moraça,
Gjuka, damn him, took his shoes off,
(let him croak, he can't live longer)
There to wade across the river,
Reach the other bank, Vranina,
Clear the way for Cetinje's fighters.
But the Slavic lad was hoodwinked,
Waiting there lay Kerrni Gila,
Ready with his flintlock musket,
Left a stain on Gjuka's forehead,
Felled him cold on sand and gravel.
When the Zagorjani shot him,
Gjuka cried out: "*kuku majko*!"
And collapsed, the first one slain there.
Traitors, may they always die thus!
Just as when a man out hunting
Shoots at ravens in a pasture,
If he kills a swarthy raven,
All the others scatter flying
In confusion and in panic.
Such was Montenegro's army.
All then took to flight in terror
When they looked at lifeless Gjuka.
Thereupon three shots did ring out
From *breshanas,* like three *zanas,*
In black garments three more mothers.
When a man a foe discovers
And he holds a steely weapon
And his heart itself is steely
And his legs are swift like bullets,
Let him die where fate would have it.
What a din and uproar followed,
Making many mothers wither,
And when Mirko came and saw that
At the ford there was an ambush,
Cried "Attack, men!" to his army,

"For at hand's Vranina's hour!"
Fast the army did make ready,
Sent off salvos, vaulted volleys,
Flintlocks fired, Italian rifles,
Dilkes fired as did *breshanas.*
End to end the lake resounded.
Oh, take courage, Met Zeneli!
Steadfast, comrade Vuksan Gjeli!
Don't give up, lad from Zagorja!
Hold your post, oh mighty Sinan!
For it seems the hill is quaking,
Oso Kuka's now arriving.
God have mercy! Oso burst forth
Like the hail on winter pastures,
With him thirty and more fighters
In the cliffs they took position.
And the flames soared o'er Vranina,
Veiling both the sky and sunlight,
Rend'ring unseen all the rifles.
So much smoke did spread and cover,
So much shrieking, groaning echoed.
Dudumjas, Italian rifles
Shot out thus a hail of bullets.
Men lay dying in the marshes,
In the marshes and the thickets,
Groaning, longing for their mothers.
Come, poor women, and be witness,
To the ford come, be here faithful
To the young lads who have fallen.
But I fear, ye Slavic mothers,
That you raised them in Cetinje
Just to leave them in Vranina,
By Albanian weapons slaughtered
For the *gospodari*'s cravings.
Weep then, but I have no pity,
For I see more in the water,
Hiding in the cliffs before them.
In the cliffs are several fighters
Who will give up lives and households,
Serve their country and the sultan.
I fear at this ford you'll witness
Much more carnage and more sorrow.

As the arms continued firing
And death Slavic heads did harvest,
You'd have thought two suns were shining,
In the East the sky was scarlet,
Sanguine-red was the Moraça.
Day dawned. In the muddy waters
Mirko saw his fighters slaughtered,
As if breathing they'd forgotten.
God have mercy, such the fury!
He freed Montenegro's *ora*
And his blood-drenched, rusty sabre.
Turning, like a bear he roared out:
"Onwards, Montenegrin falcons!"
Stormed the ford as if a whirlwind,
With his army right behind him.
"Careful now, oh Slavic scion!"
From Vranina's cliffs cried Oso,
"For the ford that you're now crossing's
Sacred ground, home of the *zanas*!"
To his feet then rose up Oso,
In his hand his sabre brandished,
And in fury did attack them,
Like a lion, foe espying,
When back to its lair it paces.
Oh, good *zana*, had these fighters
Met and battled in a duel,
(stronger none bear Slavic women,
Wilder none bear Muslim women)
Perhaps Vranina'd not have fallen.
But in heaven fate was written,
Ere these falcons could do battle.
Preng Markola cried out, warning:
"To the tower, Oso, hasten,
For the *shkjas* are there attacking."
When a wolf's among the livestock,
Led o'er fallow lands and mountains,
Swiftly does the shepherd turn back
When he sees the foe is lurking.
Just as swift was Oso Kuka
As he turned to climb the hillside.
Weep and let your tears flow, *zana*,
On the mountains where you banquet,

At the fountains where you drink and
In the shade where you lie sleeping,
In the dances that you relish.
Weep and do not check your tears, for
Up amongst those very cliffs now
Men, alas, are going to perish,
Whom you raised with such attention,
Whom you trained for arms and warfare,
You yourself did train and teach them
To assault their foes, undaunted,
To not fear as they attacked them,
So that one could beat a dozen,
Not give way when twenty struck him.
But today there's no solution,
S*hkjas* from all sides are besieging,
No solution, must they perish?
Let them die, there's no way out now,
Let them die, as did their fathers,
Let Albanians learn this lesson:
Better to be mourned and buried
Than 'neath Slavic rule to linger.
Let them die, there's no way out now.
Mirko, look, he's reached the river!
O'er the hills in secret creeps
Gjukoviq Pera from Lesendra
With light fighters from Bijoca.
Then, Vranina's *shkjas* joined battle,
Joined that army from Cetinje,
Now to capture Oso Kuka
Who was once their friend and neighbour,
Who did guard their hills and pastures,
Who watched o'er their family honour.
But the *shkjas* don't value friendship!
Lo, when the Commander got there,
All Vranina was a bonfire.
Lo, when Pera reached the battle,
There was such a din and uproar.
Albanians from the rear were fired on
When Vranina's *shkjas* came fighting.
As a torrent in a night storm
Overflows its banks and rises,
When it foams and when it rages,

Flooding over beds of gravel,
So the *shkjas* poured through Vranina,
In a wave submerged Albanians.
Thus does fight the fierce *kulshedra*
With its teeth and claws a-lashing,
Spewing fire, fomenting sulphur,
When surrounded by the *drangues.*
Thus the Albanians, *shkjas* resisting,
For the sweet land of their fathers,
Shoulders in a phalanx battled,
Reaping heads among *shkja* fighters.
Spitting flames, fired their *breshanas*,
Blood dripped on their hands from sabres,
In their hearts their pulse was pounding,
Though their heels stood fast, unmoving.
But to what end? Then the sun rose,
Rose that day for Slavic triumph,
Thirty dead and ten were injured,
To the rabid *shkjas* fell victim.
Blessed those who gave their lives up,
Blessed those who sacrificed, who
Died for sultan and their birthplace,
Died to save Albania's honour,
Spilt their blood while doing battle,
Fought as once had done their fathers.
O'er their graves may grass grow gently,
May the seasons, years weigh lightly,
Ice and snow and rainstorm. For as
Long as *zanas* sing in mountains,
Long as seas have sand and water,
Long as sun and moon are shining,
May they never be forgotten.
Let song, dance commemorate them.
All the blood that they did forfeit,
May God make it boil and bubble
Thus to hearten the Albanians
For their homeland and their language.
But, oh where is Oso Kuka?
Could it be that he has fallen?
He is holed up in the tower,
In that powder tower hiding
And has sworn an oath to God that

He alive will not surrender,
Settling score for all his comrades,
Thirty dead and ten there injured.
When the *shkjas* heard wane the firing
At the ford and at the lakeside,
Noted missing Oso Kuka
'mongst the dead around the hillock,
They at once attacked the tower.
As when at the start of springtime
Bees swarm out around the beehive,
Humming like the brooks and currents.
Thus, a hundred on the rooftop,
Cried: "Long live the Prince!" rejoicing,
While the most courageous of them
Scrambled up to the embrasures,
Breaching bloodied walls and fences.
"All housebreaking must be paid for,"
Roared out Oso like a lion,
To Cetinje his voice echoed:
"Careful now, you damned Nikolla,
Here they call me Powder Oso,
Never you've seen an Albanian
Blow himself up and you with him."
Then he set fire to the powder.
God have mercy, God be with us!
When he set fire to the powder,
See how poor Vranina ruptured,
Shot into the air the tower,
All the lake around it shuddered,
Rumbled down to Shkodra's fortress.
Bricks and stones and beams and rafters,
Arms and legs and heads and bodies,
Smoke and ash and sparks a-flying
Rained and raged upon the Viri,
On the Viri's banks cascaded
Bricks and stones and limbs of fighters.
Come and gather, Slavic mothers,
Come and gather in Vranina,
Cluster on the slope at rillside,
See the limbs stripped off your children,
Teach your offspring from this day on
Not to covet Castriota's

Land, for you'll regret it dearly.
For the blood that Oso Kuka
Spilt today upon that hillside
For the sultan and his homeland,
In Albanian veins it lingers.
Lest consumed by powder, flames, like
Oso Kuka in the tower,
Will ne'er fall the Albanian nation
To the *gospodari*'s clutches.
When the sun loomed o'er Vranina,
Hoisted was the *trobojnica,*
May that flag be cursed forever.

Canto 6

DERVISH PASHA

Almost twenty years later, in 1878, an Albanian herald appears at the Sultan's gate in Istanbul and tells of Albania's interminable suffering under Montenegrin rule. The Sultan resolves to recruit an army of fifty battalions under Dervish Pasha to repulse the Montenegrins. The poet makes a dramatic appeal to his countrymen to rise to freedom, and Turkish forces win the day. In three offensives, Podgorica, Kernica and Lake Shkodra are occupied, as is the mountain capital of Cetinje. Prince Nikolla takes to the hills. But the Congress of Berlin is to decide otherwise.

Prayer time came in Yildiz Palace.
To the gate went down the doorman,
Sultan Abdul Hamid's doorman,
Down to bar the courtyard entrance
Since for inns it is improper
To keep gates at nighttime open.
Lo, behold, there without warning
Came a traveller to the entrance,
Came a traveller with belt tightened,
To his knees were rolled his trousers,
Smeared in dust and perspiration,
Long and tiresome was his journey.
He sought access to the sultan.
"Who are you, lad?" asked the doorman,
"Who are you and what's your problem?"
Quizzed the doorman, and continued:
"There's a custom with this doorway,
Few are given leave to enter.
Even if I do admit you,
I can't promise you an exit."
"No sense asking who I am now,
On this earth I'm but a shadow,"
Said the wretched traveller, sighing,
"Once I lived, but now no longer,
Once I was of great repute, yes,
I owned land and I owned cattle,
Sheep and goats in my possession,

I had stables full of fodder,
Like the richest in the region.
Now, alas, I'm at the bottom,
Under foreign yoke I suffer,
Now the lowest man's the chieftain,
Makes the laws without the elders,
Steals the land my father gave me,
Treats me like meat for his skewer,
Free to boil me or to roast me,
Anything that gives him pleasure.
In the name of God I beg you,
Spare me all your useless questions,
I've no time for all your gossip.
I want no one else's pity,
It's enough that I bewail my
Lot, so lead me to the sultan.
I've been sent to him by Shkodra
That the sultan hear our problems,
Of the hardships and the sorrows
Now besetting poor Albania,
Now that devils are her neighbours,
Now that serpents suckle at her."
Giving way, the doorman led him,
Took him straight to see the sultan.
When the hero reached the sultan,
Soiled and filthy as he entered,
On his knees he fell before him,
And began his tale of sorrow:
"By your life, oh Father Sultan,
You are called king of Albania,
But the real king's Prince Nikolla,
From Cetinje's gathered bandits,
Led them down into Albania,
Taken, occupied Vranina,
Taken Zeta, Podgorica,
Quashed, dispelled us in Kernica,
Where, had not Mirdita's fighters
Stopped him in his march advancing,
He'd have even taken Shkodra
And, well-versed in arms and fighting,
Made himself king of Albania,
Shkodra being, long life to her,

Head and heart of all the country.
By your life, oh Father Sultan,
Wash your hands, renounce Albania,
Otherwise send out an army
Which can counter Montenegro,
For we can hold out no longer!"
Thus the sultan sat and listened,
Hearkened to him and was angered,
Called and summoned Dervish Pasha:
"Listen to me, Dervish Pasha,
Worse is now the situation,
Worse yet now, the plot has thickened,
For the prince of Montenegro's
Mustered, so they say, an army.
With it he's attacked Albania,
Taken Zeta, Podgorica,
With Vranina and Kernica,
And will soon set out for Shkodra
To make all the country Slavic,
To turn Slavic wretched Shkodra.
Call up now fifty battalions,
Rise and conquer Montenegro.
Go and teach that prince a lesson,
Who's been hounding the Albanians,
Driving them from household, homeland,
From the Highlands and the lowlands."
Poor beloved soil, Albania,
How you've suffered through the ages,
How you've wept, how you've lamented,
Years on end have you been battered,
Months and years have you been ravaged,
Taken beatings, given thrashings,
Never has your fate been altered.
Now the pasha, Dervish Pasha's
Summoned, raised a savage army,
Off to travel through your country,
Off to battle Montenegro,
Causing yet another bloodbath.
Do you think that Dervish Pasha's
Gathered, called to arms his army
Just to come to your assistance,
Just to break the iron shackles

That constrain your hands and feet now,
That have held you long in bondage?
No, believe me, not a finger
Will the pasha flick to save you,
He'll not fight the *shkjas* for your sake,
Liberation's not his business,
For wherever he has turned up
All have wept and none have praised him.
He's been sent for, Stamboul will not
Have Nikolla enter Shkodra.
He himself, he wants to keep you,
Just as in the past, in bondage,
Under heel he wants to crush you,
In your heart to plant his dagger's
Shining blade, your blood to swallow,
Take your life once and forever,
Under dirt to leave you rotting.
Where, Albania, are your heroes?
Where are now the lads you need to
Take up arms and pounce upon them,
Set upon those hostile villains,
Ruthless, thrust those steely daggers
In their breasts to show Nikolla,
Show the prince, indeed show Stamboul,
Masters here are the Albanians,
Who'll not bow to *shkja* or sultan?
But the sons you've raised, the children,
They have turned away, denied you,
Other names they give themselves now,
Some say they are *shkja* or Turkish,
Some say Greek and Zeybek others.
And when summoned forth to help you,
They refused to make an effort,
Fought for sultan and for Turkey,
Fought for Serbs and Greeks as soldiers,
Some to keep Turks in Albania,
Others to make Serb the country,
Others to make Greeks here welcome.
You they sold out to make money,
Did betray you for a *timar,*
For some farmland or a title,
Making you a whore for selling,

Not a wedded wife and mother,
Spouse of Lord George Castriota,
Whom the world will hold in honour
As the years pass and the seasons.
Therefore at your doorstep now are
Dervish Pasha and Nikolla,
Here in blood to bathe your body
And to squash, to crush your spirit,
Nothing worse could God imagine.
What more grief are you expecting,
What more sorrow lies before you,
Seeing Turk and *shkja* abase you,
Like, bereft of sons, a widow?
Listen to my words, Albanians,
Quell your quarrels and your anger,
Bear not malice, litigation,
Swear united with a *besa*,
Pledge to God a sacred *besa*,
Like those sworn by your forefathers,
Not to sell yourselves to strangers,
But to fight to save your homeland.
Otherwise our dear Albania
Will be lost and, do believe me,
God would rather see you perish,
To the *shkjas* he would commit you.
For the day will come to pass when
Good and bad will be your fortune,
All the *shkjas* will set upon the
Turks, and will besiege and slay them,
Will expel them all from Europe,
Who our blood have now been drinking
For five hundred years and more here.
If, that day, the *shkja* should find you
Locked in quarrel, oh Albanians,
Careless of your fathers' language,
No love showing for your homeland,
Heed me, he'll exterminate you,
You'll dissolve like salt in water,
For they're fierce and know no pity
To those not of Slav extraction,
Worse off those indebted to them.
Do not wait to watch the sultan,

See the king and Turkish armies
Come to save you from their clutches,
For, as we say in Albania:
'What the wolf has once devoured
Can the serpent not acquire.'
It's not strangers, here invading,
Who will bring the country freedom,
It is none but the Albanians.
Don't forget the ancient saying,
Thus I've put it down on paper:
If you cause Albania's downfall,
Your sons and your children's children,
When they follow, grow to manhood,
If indeed the *shkjas* should let them,
They the 'Highland Lute' will open,
Read these words in rage and anger.
In your graves they'll damn, condemn you,
Curse your bodies and your spirits.
'tis a sin, God be my witness,
That our land be kept in mourning,
That it weep and groan in bondage
While it has so many heroes,
Known for courage 'mongst our tribesmen,
Where the sun shines and the moon glows.
Share your thoughts and tell me, *zana*,
Will I ever see my people
All united under oath and
Out to fight and save their homeland?
Will they ever join their forces,
Ghegs and Tosks from Highlands, lowlands,
Linked beneath our red-black banners,
Here to spend blood for their birthplace?
Yes, why not? With time and effort,
Some conscripted, others willing.
Naught on earth's out of the question,
Seems at first a feat of wonder,
But then, it's all games and child's play.
Yes, indeed, the day will dawn when
All Albanian tribes will gather,
And united, weapons brandished,
Prove themselves to the barbarians
Who've offended them so gravely

That alive they'll not surrender,
Suffer foreign yoke in bondage.
Time is needed, heart afflicted,
That Albania rise and flourish.
Come the years, they pass so slowly:
In one rainy day a mushroom
Can arise, but not Albania.
Let us leave now this digression,
To our song return, continue,
For I hear in distant Shkodra
Trumpets sounding, drums a-beating,
Loud indeed Rozafat's clamour.
Dervish Pasha did not tarry,
Yes, he hastened off to Shkodra,
With his fifty known battalions,
Full of Moors and Orientals,
To set fire to raze Cetinje,
Burn, reduce it all to ashes,
And to capture Prince Nikolla,
Bring him back in chains to Stamboul,
Lock and jail him in the stables
Where they keep the neighing stallions.
Silence, *zana*, do not snigger,
For I'm ill-disposed and worried:
We can't take Nikolla living,
For he has his falcon heroes,
Who for faith and ancient freedoms,
For the *gospodari*'s honour,
Like a wedding guests' procession
Will descend upon the war grounds,
Will combat the sultan's soldiers,
Baring chests against their bullets.
For they, too, their custom honour
Never with the Turk to bargain,
Put no faith in him or trust him,
They will fight him and will kill him,
If he falls upon their country.
E'en the prince up in Cetinje,
Scion brave of Slavic mother,
Never would surrender living,
To be locked up in the stables.
But we're foes, who can deny it,

And it must be told, the truth now.
I believe in utter frankness
That at all it's hardly likely,
That Dervish will make his way up
Unimpeded to Cetinje.
Climbing's not an easy matter
In Cetinje's barren mountains.
No, indeed, no easy matter
Entering by force Cetinje,
For the prince, when he discovered
Dervish Pasha in Albania,
Sent word out to Montenegro,
Summoned young and old to battle,
Called to war the men and women,
Girded weapons on the menfolk,
Gave the women scythes and hatchets,
Loaded baskets on poor maidens,
Food to carry to the army,
Sent them to protect their freedom
From the foe out to destroy it.
For in all of Montenegro
There's one blood, tongue and religion.
They don't need their rulers just for
Heaping gold upon the nobles,
They love their land and their freedom,
Strive to bring their country forwards,
Strive for knowledge and for progress.
Thus arose the men and women,
Took position, crouched in waiting,
As the prince had thus commanded,
Lay in ambush for the onslaught,
Men and boys and girls and women.
Dervish Pasha thus invaded,
With him were fifty battalions,
Marching forwards up the mountains
To the beat of drums and trumpets.
In three *çetas* did he part them,
Sending one to Podgorica,
One to overrun Kernica.
For himself he took the third one
O'er the lake, his royal bark sailed
Like the surge upon the ocean

When it foams and when it billows.
Wicked waves did roar and thunder
As they struck the bark and battered,
Bashing bow and storming starboard,
Soaring, to the clouds they tossed it,
Then into the maelstrom cast it,
Almost, it would seem, to sink it
In some dark and endless chasm.
Thus he pummelled Montenegro,
From Veleçik to Rumia,
Set on fire the Highlands, lowlands,
Mortars mumbling, cannons barking.
All the Balkans heard the echo.
So, be careful, Prince Nikolla,
At you are sultan and empire
With their cannons and their soldiers,
'neath your feet, the earth they'll scorch it.
Turks you want to kill and slaughter?
Well, you'll get your fill of Turks now!
Go on out and block the highway,
But I'm not sure what will happen
When you cast your eyes upon them,
For their soldiers are courageous,
Best men Europe has to offer,
When they get someone to lead them,
When they get food and gunpowder.
Are you blind? Can you not see him?
Dervish Pasha's all around you,
In a vice he's caught you squealing,
You'll not flee his clutches living,
For he's very angry with you.
That the Turkish Pasha's furious
Does not bother Prince Nikolla,
Does not ruin, dash his spirits.
There, up in the cliffs and boulders,
In the hills around Rijeka
Has he readied all his forces,
Who, a sacred oath have taken,
Swearing that they'll fight and perish,
Wade in blood up to their kneecaps,
Rather than give up Cetinje.
So they promised one another

That they'd sack the sultan's soldiers,
Not to put to shame their fathers,
Who the Turks had always battled,
Never resting, never slacking,
For their faith and for their freedom.
Into *çetas* formed, he sent them
Down the mountain to Rijeka
Where are found but rocks and bushes.
Every shrub now hid two bandits,
Every rock hid two more fighters,
Two of Montenegro's warriors,
All with cartridge pouches girded,
In their belts were sabres ready,
Their *novicas* at their shoulders,
Eyes a-sparkling, curly eyebrows,
All their heads were gnarled like tree stumps.
Were an axe to strike their bodies,
No dry splinters would fall from them.
Minds were set, all were impatient
There to slash and slay the Asians.
Word was sent to Dervish Pasha:
"When you're ready, you'll be welcomed
As a friend or foe to visit,
Better stocked you'll never find me,
Bread and meat I've here to greet you,
Here awaits, too, black gunpowder,
As is wont in Montenegro."
Forwards marching, Dervish progressed
While he pillaged and he plundered,
Captured Zeta, Podgorica,
Took the Viri and Kernica,
Also seized hold of Vranina,
There, where Oso Kuka perished.
Thereupon his pace he hastened,
Passing through, he grabbed Rijeka
Onwards to his prize Cetinje,
There, where all the goshawks nested,
This, the land of Prince Nikolla,
Now to pillage and to plunder
All the prince's lands surrounding,
To entomb him nine feet under.
When he set off through Rijeka,

Marching to ascend the mountain,
Oh, great Lord, 'tis Thee we worship,
What a noise broke out, what clamour!
For the battle cries resounded,
Causing so much gore and bloodshed,
Slain were many Turkish soldiers,
Left unburied many bodies,
Left for Montenegro's vultures
Which the stench of blood had summoned.
Fiercely did the Turks do battle,
Bravely did the *shkjas* resist them,
So explosive their encounter
Like a spark that strikes gunpowder,
Oh, have mercy, God Almighty,
What a din and what a rumble!
Shots broke out like thunder banging,
Now the cannons started booming,
Rifles all began to ring out,
Turks and *shkjas* engaged in fighting,
Clutching one another, grappling,
One another now assailing,
Some were pushing, some were shoving,
Like two raging steers in combat
When on fallow field or sand shoal,
Having rested in the shadows,
Horn to horn they test their power,
Bending backs as if yoked under,
Like a goad their tails are rigid,
Clouds of dust rise from their stamping,
To the death enraged they duel
'til a shepherd comes to part them.
Twice the Turks did scale the hilltop,
Twice *shkjas* forced them to the sandbanks,
Leaving strewn with Moors the hillside.
When was launched the third offensive
Up to reach the mountain summit,
Montenegro's finest lads did
Cast aside their old *shejshanas*,
Stood there, brandishing their sabres.
Then like savage beasts they howled out,
Leapt upon the Turks like lightning,
With their sabres started slicing,

Skulls were severed from their bodies,
On the ground lay headless corpses.
There the Turks lost heart and courage,
No more did their heels touch ground, and
Turning, showed their backs, retreating
Down the hillside did they scramble.
On their tracks, the *shkjas* behind them
Shrieked and made a great commotion
As they stormed the Turks, pursuing.
Some they slashed and some they slaughtered,
'til they drove them to Rijeka,
Swift behind them like an arrow,
Did they rout them to Vranina.
Thus, when Dervish saw his army
Crushed and ravaged by Nikolla,
He was seized by rage and anger,
Stomping, kicking like a madman,
Scolded, censured his assistant.
Then he summoned new battalions,
Of the best his army offered,
Sent them off, the *shkjas* to meet and
Block their road back to Cetinje.
But Nikolla, Slavic scion,
He, that shrewd and cunning figure,
No one 'mongst the *shkjas* his equal,
Saw in time the danger coming,
Spun around and, fast retreating,
Scaled the mountain, upwards soared and
With his *çetas* did he vanish.
Fled the prince, now Dervish Pasha
Frowning, eyebrows thick and furious,
Took the road up to Cetinje.
Will the pasha take Cetinje?
Who knows, he may take Cetinje,
But I don't think he will linger,
Something in Berlin is brewing...

Canto 7

THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN

The poet asks his muse, the *zana*, what the rumbling in the distance means. The Russo-Turkish war has broken out. The Great Powers of Europe, personified in Albanian oral literature by the Seven Kings, have gathered in Berlin in 1878 to decide upon the fate of the peoples of the Balkans. All have their protectors except the Albanians. Prince Nikolla of Montenegro appears before the Congress in rags and appeals for assistance. He is accorded the Albanian-speaking lands of Plava (Plav), Gucia (Gusinje), Shkodra and the northern Albanian Alps down to the river Drin. The poet damns all those who sign the accord and predicts disaster for the Montenegrin occupants. The jubilant prince returns to Cetinje and orders Pal Milani to march on Albania with five battalions. Milani expresses misgivings, which the prince dismisses with a haughty laugh, conferring military leadership on the hero, Mark Milani.

Hear me, *zana,* thee I swear by,
Listen to me, can you tell me,
What's the meaning of that rumbling
In the distance in Rumelia,
Off in Plevna and Bulgaria?
Is it cannon fire or groaning
Causing underfoot the shudders?
No, indeed, it isn't groaning
Causing underfoot the shudders,
But from Russia cannons sounding
And from Turkey mortars pounding,
Making thunder all Rumelia.
Day and night the din continues,
Bathed in blood is all Rumelia
As the Turks and *shkjas* do battle,
As the Turks with Moscow struggle.
Blood and gore the land submerges.
Broken hearts of mothers knowing
That their sons are in those reaches,
For their heads before the barrels,
When the cannons belch and bellow,
Are indeed not worth a penny.
Even worse, friends, would have happened,

Had the *shkjas* invaded Stamboul,
Thrown the sultan out of business,
But the Powers interceded,
Terminating all the shooting.
Now the Seven Kings and sultan
In Berlin have come together,
There they've started taking counsel,
Talking to resolve the matter,
Making peace to stop the fighting,
Put an end to war and troubles,
Halt the evil, hate and rancour,
Setting landmarks, drawing borders
Through the lands of all the empire,
From the Black Sea through the Balkans.
But today, since faith is wanting,
Since on earth all trust is missing
And the stronger side with weapons
Is the one who always wins out,
I am filled with doubt, suspecting
Something evil's going to happen
To Albania and its people,
For they're lacking friends, *kumaras,*
Who on their behalf could parley
And prevail upon the others.
Look who's here, it's Prince Nikolla,
Moaning, robes and garments wrinkled,
Two hands wide his shawl protruding,
Trudging forwards on his snowshoes,
'round his knees are ragged trousers,
Stones would bleed in pity for him.
There he stood before the Powers
And with idle talk and nonsense
Into tears he broke before them,
Moaning that his land was barren,
That the flat plains, hills were arid,
That the earth was dry and crumbling,
Full of naught but rocks and boulders,
Not a twig or corn stalk grows there.
Thus, his people, tried by hunger,
Would abandon Montenegro,
Were he not accorded fertile
Land, for instance, like Albania

With its famed and fruitful pastures
Purchased yard-wise, sold in handfuls,
Sold for gold though bought with silver,
With its mountain pastures, broad plains,
With its sheep and goats a-grazing,
With its grain and with its fodder,
With its farmland and its commerce.
Closely did the Powers listen,
Heeded, did not reprimand him.
With the sultan then conferring,
They agreed to let Nikolla
Pluck his Plava, get Gucia,
Have the Highlands all with Shkodra
Down to where the river Drin flows.
May God curse him and condemn him,
Sultan, king or any other
Who agrees to sign a warrant
Snatching land from the Albanians,
Under Slavic yoke to put them,
Make them pay both tithes and taxes.
For, by God, by Him we worship,
Never will we cede our homeland
Lest we fight, blood to our kneecaps.
Should our homeland yet be taken,
Would the whole world be on fire,
All the peoples then would tremble,
Living under sun and moonlight.
Yes, our fury'd seethe, boil over,
Yes, our fame would echo, ringing
In the ears of God Almighty.
And our blessed Lord in fury,
All of Europe would He slaughter,
Bathed in guts and gore would leave it.
Prince Nikolla, when he heard that
Europe and Stamboul would let him
Take possession of Albania,
Turned from thief into a noble,
Placed on one brow his *kapica*.
How he revelled, how he rollicked,
Set to prancing, jubilating
As if he were at a wedding!
Good luck to you, Slavic scion,

In the hovels of Cetinje
Time has come now for some feasting.
Fair white bread will he be eating,
Steer meat, too, will he be roasting,
Wine from jug spouts he'll be quaffing
'til his cheeks are flushed and ruddy
And he feels his whiskers soaring.
Thus, he sped off for Cetinje,
Sent word, summoned Pal Milani:
"Pal, my good lad, do not dally,
Do not even wait an hour,
Set off like a goshawk soaring,
Come now henceforth to Cetinje,
For an army I will give you,
Five battalions of young soldiers,
All hawks born in Montenegro.
You must lead them to Albania,
Off to conquer all the lands of
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia,
For the Kings bestowed them on me,
To dispose of as I wish to.
In a week's time you must conquer
Therefore Plava and Gucia,
Pounce upon those Highland fighters
Like a wolf in ambush prowling,
Make them tame with ropes and sabres
So that they will heed my sheep's staff.
Far and wide invade the country,
Seize it down to the Dry Torrent.
Once the Highlands have been taken,
When I have Plava, Gucia,
We'll advance and enter Shkodra,
There we'll dance and will make merry.
Like colts prancing in the meadows
No thorns underfoot will harm us."
Pal Milani then responded:
"Difficult's this undertaking,
In one week you'll take no Highlands,
Rifles cannot seize Albania.
Mark my words now, don't start poking,
Don't provoke a nest of hornets,
For they'll prove to be your downfall.

You're forbidden in this venture,
No one's been attacked or murdered,
Neither God nor custom lets you
Grab by force a foreign country.
Have me jump into a bonfire,
Make me cross the mighty ocean,
Give me word and I'll obey you,
But I'll go not to Albania."
Then the prince began to chuckle:
"You're no man of ours, no hero,
You're a man for eating pudding,
Now you start to preach, commanding,
Think you're talking to a woman
Who would tremble at your orders,
Saying it's a foreign country.
No, I deem that you should rather
Place upon your head a mitre,
Let your beard grow to your kneecaps,
Be a Montenegrin priest, or
Better still, go home, returning
To your distaff like a maiden,
With your wife take up the spindle,
Sitting with her on a bucket
At the doorstep in the sunshine,
Since for warfare you are useless.
Warfare calls for Mark Milani,
Ancient hero, lion-hearted,
He knows how to lead an army,
How to take Plava, Gucia,
How to beat the Highland fighters.
He's the one to enter Shkodra,
Enter Shkodra with flags waving,
Make it part of Montenegro."
Thus the prince spoke, gave the war cry
To assemble all his fighters.
Midst the apple trees the *zana*
Chirped to him: "Oh, Prince Nikolla,
With your words you've gone too far now,
Time forever passes slowly,
And you never know the outcome.
If you try to run and hustle
Faster than your feet can take you,

As it seems to me you want to,
Since you made a resolution
Sending forces to Gucia,
Without asking first the men there:
'Will you give me poor Gucia,
Will you let me have the Highlands?'
No two rifle shots you'll fire
On the Albanians, oh Nikolla.
Those who enter not as guests may
Find themselves in dire straits there,
For of steel were born those fighters,
Ever ready there to perish
Should men tread on land or honour.
Strangers have no place among them
For they'll ne'er surrender, living,
Neither to the prince nor sultan.
They are kings in their own country.
Who provokes them will regret it!"

Canto 8

ALI PASHA OF GUCIA

Ali Pasha of Gucia sets out at the break of dawn, bidding his mother and his wife farewell. On his journey through the mountains, he takes his rest under an oak tree where he encounters an *ora*, a female spirit of the Albanian Highlands. She chides the Albanians for their lack of patriotism and bids Ali remember what his land has given him: shade, fresh water and spring meadows. He swears upon a gravestone that he will sacrifice himself and his son for the good of Albania. With a sprig of rosemary, the *ora* bestows upon him magic powers to wrench trees out of the soil and replant them.

Daylight dawned before the sun rose,
Ali Pasha, blazing hero,
Wakened early on this morning,
Put his garments and his belt on,
Donned his high knee boots, departed,
Went out, striding to the stable,
Where he saddled up his stallion,
Slipped the golden bridle on it,
And the patent leather saddle,
With three bellybands he girthed it.
Like a *zana* reared the stallion,
Like a *zana* on Mount Tomorr.
To the courtyard gate he led it
Where he called out to his mother,
Where he called out and requested:
"Dearest mother, listen to me,
Treat our guests and friends with honour,
Welcome all those to be welcomed,
Let no beggar at the door weep,
At the door let weep no beggar,
Be to him a sister, brother,
Be to him a mother, father,
As our ancestors have taught us,
For I've business to attend to
And must be off now for Peja,
Off for Peja and for Reka,
There to meet with Haxhi Zeka,

What will happen I don't know, or
When I'll get back home to see you,
No fixed limit's on the journey."
To his bride he then turned, saying:
"One request I now leave with you,
Raise my son to be a noble,
Be a true man, an Albanian,
Be a hero, sought for counsel,
Who'll maintain our laws and customs,
Who will fight for land and sultan,
Who'll know how to lead and listen,
Who will keep his word and weapons
In whatever task he faces.
Should however Montenegro
Rise and occupy Gucia
While the lad lies in his cradle,
Then, by God who did create him,
Listen, woman, to my words now,
Make of lifeless stone your heart and
Chop his head off in the cradle.
Let the prince not take him living,
For I'll not disgrace our homeland,
I will not have people saying
Scanderbeg's blood, Ali Bey's son,
Has been serving Prince Nikolla,
Has been wearing their *kapica*,
Under Slavic yoke he's living,
Has to him paid tithes and taxes.
Better mourn him at his graveside
Than see him in Slavic serfdom."
Thus spoke Ali, then he climbed up
On his steed, rode down the mountain,
Lost in thought, tobacco smoking,
Swiftly like a hailstorm pelting.
What is Ali Pasha pond'ring,
Eyebrows thick, with stern expression,
Frowning eyes, two sombre arrows,
Is he fed up now with living?
No one knows what he's been thinking,
No one knows but the Almighty
Who ne'er sleeps and never slumbers,
He who reigns o'er years and seasons,

And wherever He should gaze out,
He sees man's heart deep within him,
Sees the soul's desires churning,
All the longing and the yearning,
All that mixture of emotions,
Some are fair and some ferocious.
Yes, He knows what Ali Pasha's
Thinking as he journeys onwards.
I can only tell you one thing,
That, while riding in his saddle,
Swiftly coursing down the highway,
He had left much road behind him,
And his steed like clouds did hastened.
Then he happened on a pathway
Where he saw a lovely oak tree,
And the oak tree, shade it offered,
Right beside it was a fountain,
Flowing spring, like gold it sparkled.
There he halted with his courser
And dismounted in the shadows,
There to rest beside the fountain.
As he sheltered in the shadows
Like a lion in the desert,
Tired and panting on a hillock,
Having chased in vain a rival,
Some swift beast who stole his cubs and
Then escaped the lion's fury,
Weary-eyed did Ali stare out,
Gazing all around his homeland
Stretching gracefully before him
With its lakes and fields and rivers,
And its mountains so majestic,
And its verdant forests rising.
In his eyes welled tears of sorrow
At the sad fate of his homeland
Always ruled by foreign powers.
And the worst ones had oppressed it,
Never let it raise its head up,
Never let it see the daylight.
In the shade the hero lingered,
As he pondered on his country,
When he spied there in the clearing,

Dressed in white, approach a spirit,
Like a maiden to be married,
'round her midst a golden waistband,
And her hair flowed down her figure
Like the sunbeams down the mountains
When the sun dawns and arises
In the mists of early morning.
Body slender, a *breshana*,
Like the summer, like a *zana*,
In her splendour downhill floating
'til she reached the very fountain,
Came and sat there under rainbows,
There among the verdant ridges,
There between the silver torrents,
As the sunbeams shone upon her.
Startled was the horse to see her
(For it was not wearing blinkers),
Pricked its ears and raised its head up,
Could not look away, bedazzled.
Two or three times then it snorted,
Backing up upon the meadow,
Right to where Ali was lying.
Ali Pasha also saw her
As he lay on one side resting,
And he propped himself up, turning
To discern more and distinguish
Whether she was god or human.
As he sat there dazed, observing,
Did he finally inquire:
"By the one, the God that made you,
Are you human or a *zana*?
Do you hold Bayram or Easter?"
"What I am and what I'm not, sir,
If I hold Bayram or Easter,
If in life I cast a shadow,
There's no time to ask such questions,"
Said the spirit then to Ali,
"For Albania is in peril,
Faith and honour've been forgotten.
Prince Nikolla's like a vampire.
Like a vampire has he risen,
Placed his watchmen on the hilltops,

Set to charge and seize Rozafat.
In Berlin the congress chose to
Give Albania to the *shkjas* now."
"No! By God, what are you saying?"
Jumped up Ali, calling to her,
"Is there no God and no sultan
That some prince in Montenegro
Can now make a resolution
To invade and take our Highlands
Through which flow Drin and Valbona?
Ne'er a foreign plough we've seen here,
Ne'er paid either tithes or taxes."
"Yet," responded then the spirit,
"Under Slavic heel they'll suffer,
They will pay him tithes and taxes
For as long as he is breathing.
For today the Albanian people
Sell their souls for money, *timars*.
They've denied their faith and bloodline
And forgotten all their homeland,
And their weapons they make use of
Just to murder one another,
Not to liberate their country,
Nor for good and common welfare,
But to choose which foreign ruler
They will call lord of Albania.
Shame on all Albanian tribesmen
For defiling their forefathers,
For accepting to be servants,
Under foreign yoke be beaten
Like no others on the planet.
I'm the *ora* of Albania,
Yet I damn and curse its people:
May the couch grass grow unweeded,
May the herds forever languish,
May no sons be born at hearthstone,
May no brothers grow, no sisters,
Let them under foreign yoke now
Just like salt in water vanish."
Ali turned to her, responding:
"Let me rather leave the mountains,
Quit the mountain pastures, *zana*,

Do not curse us, may you prosper,
Heavily your spell would hit us,
For the breach of word of honour's
Made the tribesmen of Albania
Tremble at the *gospodari*.
At the prince's glance we quiver,
Who among the kings is but an
Amulet to drape a pony.
Listen though, if you have ever
Rested in Albania's shadows,
Found a spring to take refreshment,
Found a meadow here to play in,
Here to gambol and to frolic
With the other spritely beauties
When the springtime fair does blossom.
By your eyes of starry wonder,
By the eyes you close and open,
Like the moon above the woodlands,
Tell me on this shady mountain
How to rescue poor Albania.
Here upon the grave I swear by
Shala Ridge and Mount Tomorr, I'd
Sacrifice myself to save it,
Offer up my son, not mourn him."
When the *ora* of Albania
Heard the Pasha of Gucia,
She rejoiced in exultation
And responded to the pasha:
"Rise, oh Ali, if you're living,
We've no time today for talking,
For the prince has readied cannons.
Go and meet with Haxhi Zeka,
Rouse Kosova, gather Reka,
Call the Tosks and Ghegs to battle,
Gather them together just like
Pomegranate seeds, united,
Bind them with a pledge and promise
On the *shkjas* to pounce, assailing.
I'll be with you, right beside you,
Underfoot the *shkjas* I'll trample.
Since an oath you've taken, swearing
For your homeland to die gladly,

Vigour and new force I'll grant you
From the soil to tear the trees out,
Not a sabre e'er will slay you,
Not a rifle bullet kill you,
And no cannonball will fell you."
Thus she spoke to Ali Pasha,
Spoke to him and came up closer,
Put her hand into her bosom,
Pulled out rosemary to give him
So that he could smell the fragrance.
Then she, coaxing, asked of Ali:
"Come on, Ali, try to do it,
Try to tear the tree and roots out,
Pull it out and put it back now."
Hero Ali concentrated,
With his hands an oak he grappled,
Two or three times did he shake it,
Tore it out with all the roots on,
But when set to plant the tree back,
Only knee-deep could he ram it.
Loudly laughed the Earthly Beauty
When she saw that Ali Pasha
Couldn't plant back all the oak tree.
Rosemary she gave him once more
So that he could smell the fragrance.
Once more Ali rose to try it,
With his hands the oak he grappled.
Light as if a fence post holding,
Did he thrust it swiftly upwards,
And into the soil did ram it
To its branches, then he wondered
What she'd say this time, the *ora*.
But the Good One had now changed to
A fair dewdrop midst the flowers.
Ali stood there quite bedazzled,
Cast his eyes down at the forest,
Then glanced up, where snow had fallen,
Looking to see what had happened,
When his courser started neighing,
With its hooves it starting stamping,
As if wanting to remind him
That there was no time to linger.

Thinking back, Ali remembered,
How the spirit had informed him,
That Albania was in peril.
Then his courser did he mount and
Set off with it at a gallop,
In a flash the two had vanished.

Canto 9

THE LEAGUE OF PRIZREN

As the sun rises over Mount Cukali, the *zanas* and *oras* have assembled to take counsel at the events in Prizren, like the ancient gods and goddesses on Olympus discussing the course of the Trojan War. It is not Agamemnon who takes the place of honour, but Ali Pasha of Gucia. From their alpine meadow, they observe events and enumerate the participants of the league of noblemen which met in Prizren in 1878. Abdyl Frashëri and other Albanian patriots address the league with rhetorical finesse and resolve to send a letter to the Congress of Berlin to voice their opposition to the Slavs' designs on their land.

Dawn's first rays did strike Cukali,
Let us sing, oh mountain *zana*,
With a Highland Lute, we'll tell of
How the elders of Albania
Down in Prizren came together
To deliberate, consider
How to rescue their poor homeland
Now from Montenegro's clutches,
Which had sent out cannons, soldiers
To pluck Plava and Gucia,
To snatch Shkodra and the Highlands,
Down to where the river Drin flows.
For they say that Stamboul's sultan
Gave free rein to Prince Nikolla
In our hearths to kindle fire,
Through our fields to drive his cattle,
In our groves to chop his firewood,
With our maids and wives to dally.
He, the *shkja*, to mock us as if
No Albanians could resist him.
But, by God, there are Albanians,
Many noble-hearted fighters,
Men of wisdom, dauntless heroes,
In the face of death who'll fight on
If their land or honour's threatened.
Listen though, for Ali Pasha,
Eyebrows thick, did frown in fury,

Frowned with eyebrows thick, in fury
When the hero heard the news of
How Berlin had held a Congress
Giving to the *shkjas* Albania.
Off to Peja went the hero,
Sending word to all the country,
To the bayraktars and chieftains,
To the voyvodes and the leaders
That they forthwith come to Prizren,
Come to Prizren to take counsel
And, as always, for their country,
Sacred oaths swear and allegiance,
Pledge, declare their word of honour
Not to yield an inch of land up
Ne'er alive to *shkjas* surrender,
Not to don the Slav *kapica*,
And oppose the sultan for as
Long as Albania existed,
For as long as dogs kept barking,
For as long as cocks kept crowing
On the plains and in the woodlands.
At the word that Ali sent them
Rose united all the country,
All the Ghegs and Toskëria,
All the bayraktars and leaders,
All the agas and the pashas,
All the beys and voyvodes answered.
Famous heroes, men of honour,
Far and wide known for their wisdom,
Much sought after for their counsel,
Some with escorts, some came solo.
Like the stars at nighttime shining,
All did gather there in Prizren
And were welcomed by the people,
Offered food and open hearts there
As is wont throughout Albania
When a guest should chance to visit.
When the heroes had assembled,
Did they rise and walk together
To the venue of the council
At the foot of Prizren's mountain.
Row on row they took their places,

At their head was Ali Pasha.
Who cried from the shady linden
Up on Luboteni's pastures,
Cries that echoed in the valleys?
The blithe *ora* of Albania
To a spring had come for bathing,
There, the Good One stood observing
How below her, down in Prizren,
Gathered the Albanian heroes.
She beheld them, was delighted,
Took flight for the mountain peaks and
Called out to the *zana* of Sharri
In the sweet tongue of Albania,
Making the surroundings echo.
"Can you hear me, good companion,
Slender, honey-nourished figure?
Look now from this mountain pasture,
Feast your eyes upon the feat that
Neither Turks nor *shkjas* have managed."
Having heard the *ora* speaking,
Did the *zana* set off, soaring,
Off she flew and in a flash she
Winged to Luboteni's pasture.
There she met up with the *ora*,
Hand in hand there they stood talking,
Hand in hand there like two sisters,
Then they sat down on a hillside.
On that steep slope, having settled,
Did the *ora* turn and utter:
"I know best of all about you,
Know you've always taken pleasure
Hearing manly conversation,
Listening to those deeds so daring,
Learning of those earthly heroes,
Who for faith, to free their homeland,
Let their sabres clash like lightning,
Made the planet shake with thunder,
Chopped their foes up into pieces,
So I called you, eel-shaped eyebrows,
To come over to this pasture,
Just to show you, in this age now,
There are still men, as in old times,

Who'll not shrink from smoking powder,
Who'll not wince at sabres clanging,
Squarely their opponents facing.
Can you see them down in Prizren,
All those men in counsel gathered?
Can you see them, do you know them?"
"I can see them but don't know them,
Cannot tell you who is down there,"
Gave as answer the fair *zana*,
"But I'm getting the impression
The Achaeans are alive now,
Those who distant Troy did ravage,
And the hero who's their chairman,
Who is leading the assembly,
Seems to be a type of *drangue*,
He who looks like Agamemnon,
And the other, closer to us,
With his two long drooping whiskers,
Dangling down upon his shoulders,
He who declaims loudly, shouting,
Looks to me like Diomedes."
To herself guffawed the *ora*,
To herself laughed and responded:
"Those down there are no Achaeans,
Not Achaeans or Dardanians,
Neither giants nor Cyclopes,
But the leaders of Albania,
Of the Ghegs and Tosks the chieftains
Who've appeared in this location
To swear oaths and pledge allegiance
And to gird on armoured weapons
To reject the plan which Europe
Has agreed on with the sultan
To give way to Montenegro
And divide up poor Albania.
And the hero who's their chairman,
Who is leading the assembly,
That one there, that type of *drangue*
Who resembles Agamemnon,
He's no other, dearest maiden,
Than the hero, Ali Pasha,
Who, his country's rights defending,

Would put fire to his household,
Sacrifice his son and mother,
Sacrifice his own life for them.
And the other, closer to us,
With his two long whiskers wilting
That now brush against his neighbours,
No, he isn't Diomedes
But the bayraktar of Shkreli,
Like a tower on a castle
Which defies both swords and cannons,
He is known as Marash Vata.
Other men are down there with them,
Bayraktars and beys and chieftains
Who are known for words and wisdom,
For their nobleness and courage,
They have neither peers nor equals
In Albania or around it.
See the one with dark complexion,
With the kilt and with the leggings,
Him whose glances are like arrows,
Whom the others greet with honour,
Who speaks thus with poised composure,
Words of prudence, though upbraiding,
Words well-chosen and well-spoken
Which make king and sultan mindful?
And his noble family's members
Are renowned throughout Albania
For their quills and for their knowledge
Without which the country'd falter.
He's Frashëri Bey, the hero,
Who wherever he has wandered
Is the fame of Toskëria
And the pride of all Albania.
After him another leader,
Prenk Bibë Doda, noble lad he,
Who though young in age is noted
For sagacity in counsel.
If you search for wisdom spoken,
He's the one, a captain, *zana*,
He's the Captain of Mirdita,
Far and wide his words are quoted,
Widely emoted, widely noted,

Love and hate does he awaken.
Next in line is a Toptani,
Near and far he, too, is touted
Both for good deeds and for evil,
For the strongman, as you know well,
Leaves both good and bad behind him
When he strives to climb the ladder.
Next to him comes then Zogolli,
Gjetë Gegë Shllaku and Begolli,
Then Çun Mula and Mar Lula,
One from Hoti, one from Shala,
Strong in weapons, wise in speaking,
Like Dodë Preçi from Kastrati,
And the Berat lord Vrioni,
And the famed hero Deralla,
Who, though rarely were heard speaking,
Had but measured words of prudence
On the subject of resistance
To defend their sacred homeland.
On the other side, oh *zana*,
Is Shan Deda, man from Shkodra,
Who's the son of Dedë Jakupi,
And who's clear and plain when speaking
Both with Christians and with Muslims.
With a household steeped in weapons
He'll not hear of king or sultan.
But I'm sure that you, oh *zana*,
Will agree with my description,
In his eyes I can distinguish
That whatever duty calls for,
He'd not hesitate to shoot out."
"There's one thing I'd like to know yet,
Who's that man with black hair, standing
With two pistols and a ramrod,
With his skullcap o'er one eye and
Trousers hanging from his haunches?
No one else's trousers sag thus."
"He's Abdullah Dreni, *zana*,
Without him there'd be no meeting,
Prizren trembles at his temper,
Prizren and Gjakova fear him,
All around, Kosova shudders

Since he always keeps his promise.
For a friend he's given word to
He would gladly burn his house down.
Always fighting with the sultan,
He'll not have his land dishonoured."
While on Luboteni's pasture
In the cool shade of the linden
Talked the *zana* and the *ora*
Hand in hand and head to head were.
Abdul Frashëri down in Prizren,
Abdul, Tosk man full of wisdom,
Spoke to open the assembly.
"Long before the grey-skinned she-wolf
Left the Capitoline forests
To take Romulus to suckle,
After Troy had been demolished,
And in yonder Ural mountains,
In those rough and rugged forests,
Were the Slavs, like craggy beasts there
On the lookout for crabapples,
And when here, down in the Balkans,
Our forefathers, the Pelasgians,
Grazed their herds on fields and meadows,
Drove their flocks within God's country,
There a throne was, law and order.
On the road to higher culture
They had progressed, made advancements,
In the springtime of the planet
When the north wind had receded,
On Vesuvius' broom did blossom.
From the Caucasus to Dover's
Cliffs in Albion perfidious,
Nowhere is an older people
Than the famed race of Albanians.
Here were done great deeds for Europe,
Ancient feats which forged their start here.
Here among our cliffs and mountains,
Zeus was first to tame the planet
And, with augurs from Dodona,
Freed mankind of savage instincts.
Here, too, did the *oras, zanas*
Lead their dance and start to frolic.

On the broad plains, lowland pastures
Pegasus did romp and gambol.
Here strode also Alexander,
Who was destined to be leader,
Right to Hindustan he hastened,
Thunder-bearing, eyes a-flashing.
Here, too, sabre-whetting Pyrrhus,
Like a tempest crossed the ocean,
Pitched camp at the gates of Rome and
Slew all the young Roman soldiers.
From all sides did he attack them,
Bound by oaths and by his honour,
There the battle raged ferocious,
Blood and gore the earth did cover,
Not a cliff or mountain managed
To resist the hero's onslaught.
To a ruthless wave he fell then,
Arms in hand, in fire he perished.
In those days did Gauls and Romans
Come and cross our lands, traversing,
Like the Ostrogothic tribesmen
And the Slavs (could they but vanish!),
Yet Albanians never bent their
Necks to foreign yokes while living.
Rather, to the mountains fleeing,
They would not pay tithes and taxes.
As the breakers on the ocean,
Foaming white into a mountain,
Leaving death and fear behind them,
Swell and crash against the sea cliffs,
So the might of all opponents
Who would strip away our freedom
Shatter will on plated armour
Of Albania's mountain soldiers.
Sultan Murad once believed that
The Albanians had lost courage,
He made ready to assault them
And enslave them as his prisoners,
Sent an army full of fighters,
Lads well-versed in bloody battle.
All the world with fear was silent,
Europe wept with teardrops streaming,

But her downfall proved unfounded,
For our Scanderbeg like lightning
Drew his sabre there in Kruja,
How it flashed out in the sunlight!
Like a lion was he roaring,
All the land to battle rallied,
'Those of valour, let them fight now,
Stop with weapons Turkish daring.'
To a man rose up Albania
Girded tightly on their weapons,
And like hailstorm and like windstorm
They set siege upon the Turks there.
Earth did shudder at the onslaught,
Clouds of smoke rose to the heavens,
Mountains, barren boulders echoed,
Blood flowed to the plains in torrents.
Felled upon the plain of Dibra,
Like an ox when knifed and butchered,
Did the janissaries languish
'til they, underfoot, were snuffed out.
Only too late did they see that
No brute force could take Albania.
It's a lie that the Albanians
Will not die to save their homeland."
"Yes, by God, they'll gladly do so!"
Swore Shan Deda, now excited,
"Yes, they always died, were slaughtered
When their homeland was in peril.
Even Stamboul's sultan's seen them
Raise their rifles up against him
When the Turks from Asia Minor
Trampled on them and their customs.
When the country's good requires it,
When the nation's freedom's questioned,
All of Scanderbeg's grandchildren,
Of all faiths and all persuasions,
Will beset the foe, assailing
As a falcon grips a sparrow,
Right and left the soil by sabres
Will be drenched in blood behind them.
The Albanians, old as cavemen,
Always free have lived their lifespans,

Never since the days and nights, yes,
Never since the years were fashioned
Have they ever bowed their heads to
Anyone but the Almighty,
Him who feeds the woodworms, beetles,
Him who garbs the blooming flowers."
"Rise to arms then, manly heroes,
We are willing now to perish
For our freedom, land and honour,"
Abdyl cried out, intervening,
"Now or never will Albanians
Sacrifice their lives, possessions,
For the land that they are heir to,
For their honour and their freedom.
For the Seven Kings and sultan
In Berlin have come together,
There decided from their counsel
That the Highlands be awarded,
That the prince receive the Highlands,
That divided be our households,
That abandoned be our homeland
To the *shkjas,* that we be servants.
All the sons of Castriota
Who'll not suffer loss of honour,
Men of strength, like ancient heroes,
Let them, storming, take cruel weapons,
And make haste to the Cem river,
Where the *shkjas* do wait and menace,
Let them show the world and prove that
We'll not yield without resistance.
Not a stranger will set foot here,
None but us will drive the cattle.
For as long as we are living,
Will we be enslaved by no one.
With our bones we'll build a high wall,
High and lofty 'round Albania.
Not a Russian gun or cannon
Will be able e'er to breach it."
Abdyl Frashëri was speaking
When Mar Lula, man of Shala,
Fiery-eyed and falcon-hearted,
Man of words and man of weapons,

Interrupted at the council:
"Saint Bartholomew be my witness,
As to my help for our country,
There's no need for you to chide me.
Since Albania's been in trouble,
To my cheeks I've held my rifle,
For my homeland and for freedom,
Taken booty, taken vengeance,
Like a beast up in the mountains,
Barefoot, naked and in hunger.
Not to kings nor to the sultan
Did I give a word of greeting.
And our language I've preserved it,
I've maintained our laws and customs,
Not betrayed our ancient bloodline
To get money or a *timar*.
Therefore, if the *shkja*'s intending
Here to come and take Albania
(and they say that's his intention),
He'll brush up against my weapons,
Meet with Dukagjini's fighters
Who, with help from the Almighty,
Will frustrate Berlin's decision
And bring freedom to Albania.
Tell me, why with *shkjas* should we fight
While the Turks here in our country
Never cease to bring misfortune?
'round my neck they've kept the noose tight,
Held my heart in arid torment,
Killed my father and my mother,
And defiled my wife and sister,
Left no son for me to raise here.
From the fields they hauled my harvest,
Took the land that I was heir to,
Tore to rags our sacred *Kanun*,
Plucked my oxen for their ploughing,
Took the cows and calves all with them,
Took the sheep and lambs all with them,
All the sheep and goats were pilfered,
Laid waste to my pens and pastures,
Now they've even banned my speaking
In the tongue of my forefathers,

Pressed their knees against my belly,
Squeezed and crushed my soul and spirit.
Nothing worse could e'er befall me,
Being prisoner in their clutches.
Why these Turks from Asia Minor
Do they loiter in our country,
Saying we should fight Nikolla?
No, by God, though praise be to Him,
I'm no Moor that they'll dispose of
To be banished into battle
Just because a king or sultan
Wants to keep me as his servant.
I'll fight only for my freedom,
For my honour, for Albania,
Foreign landlords I'll not suffer,
I'll obey no king or sultan,
The Albanian's his own sultan!"
"Bayraktar, how well you've spoken!"
Praised the hero Ali Pasha,
Answering the chief of Shala.
"You don't mince your words when speaking,
When you're speaking to the council,
Working for the country's welfare.
For Albanians, as we stand here,
Turks and *shkjas* are all the same now,
Both the Turks and *shkjas* are at us,
Cannot stand to recognize us.
Both of them to us are foreign,
Folk who to themselves or others
Are not able to bring goodness,
Neither wisdom nor reflection,
Neither skills and trades nor commerce,
Neither education, culture.
But we, as a tiny nation,
One with no protectors, brothers,
Can't defy, resist the *shkjas* who
Strive to swallow and destroy us.
Calmly pondering, I tell you
That, as in the past, it's better
That we stay with Stamboul's sultan
To resist and fight Nikolla.
For sometime the day will dawn when,

Yes, the Turks will trip and stumble,
Tosk and Gheg, they will then fuse like
Pomegranate seeds together,
And we'll toss them out, the Turks who
Change their hairstyle, not their customs,
Hurl them headlong in a chasm
Break their necks in ancient Mosul.
Therefore, men, I think it best to
Interrupt here our discussions,
And be seated, write a letter,
Scribe a letter, as is custom,
To Berlin, the Seven Kings there,
Saying under *shkjas* we'll not live
'til the Drin, Shkumbin and Buna
Rivers, all three here have dried up."
Thus the Pasha of Gucia
Spoke, and chieftains of Albania
Laid out paper, penned a letter,
Word for word considered wisely:
"You, oh Seven Kings, Great Powers,
You in Stamboul who are sultan,
Greetings from Albania's chieftains.
On the judgment you awarded,
Giving to the *shkjas* our homeland,
Please consider well the matter.
Doom is likely to befall us,
For to no one we'll be servants,
We'll pay no one tithes and taxes,
This our homeland, fair Albania,
God himself bestowed upon us,
Not a gift from the Italians,
From the French it was not filched or
From the English, from the Teutons,
From the Slavs for sure not stolen,
Who but lately seized the Balkans.
Who knows where they hang their hats now,
Here today and gone tomorrow,
Moving like a cloud of locusts?
As to Stamboul and its sultan,
Who says Shkodra and the Highlands
Shall be gifts for Prince Nikolla?
You can tell him that Albania's

Not a fig within a basket,
To some guest just to be proffered.
It's the land of our forefathers,
Yes, of Scanderbeg the birthplace,
Yes, the land of Mois Golemi,
Homeland of Lekë Dukagjini.
And of Kuka and Muzaku
And of Streza, Arianiti,
Who all with the Turks did battle.
Thus there's no one, king or sultan,
Who can cede or sell our home as
Long's Albanians are still present
On the earth to cast a shadow."
Thus they ended the epistle,
Finished writing and did fold it.
On its way they sent said letter,
Gave it to Berlin where'd gathered
All the Seven Kings and sultan,
Passing judgement on the planet.

Canto 10

MEHMET ALI PASHA

It is 1879. The telegraph wires bring the news that the Sultan has appointed a new pasha. In Gjakova, the Albanian Highland chiefs gather at the home of Abdullah Dreni to meet the new envoy. Mehmet Ali Pasha greets the chiefs warmly, but is obliged to reveal to them that the Sultan has decided to give way to Prince Nikolla. The Albanians are outraged, whereupon Mehmet Ali Pasha arrests them. Friends and relatives of the prisoners, in turn, surround the house and demand that Abdullah Dreni hand over the pasha. Because of the strict code of Albanian hospitality, Abdullah Dreni of course cannot give up his guest and must defend him. The house is taken by storm. The pasha and a number of Albanian elders are slain. Once again, Albanians are fighting themselves because of the Turks, the poet laments. The Albanian chiefs send the Sultan a letter requesting that he dispatch another pasha. They are resolved never to live under Prince Nikolla of Montenegro.

In the *vilayet* wires were humming:
"All ye bayraktars and chieftains,
All the beys and noble rulers
From Kaçanik to Qafa e Diellit
Hasten forthwith to Gjakova.
A new pasha's been appointed
Who will speak words of importance
To the chieftains of Albania
At Abdullah Dreni's mansion."
After three days, three nights, gathered
All the chieftains in Gjakova,
Some were beys and others agas,
Bayraktars and voyvodes met there.
As their leaders, came two nobles,
Ali Pasha and Haxhi Zeka,
Both of them by pledge united,
Like two bullets in a flintlock.
To the pasha did they hasten,
Were received well by the pasha,
Well by Mehmet Ali and he
Served them coffee and tobacco,
Of their kith and kin inquiring,

Of their commerce and their produce,
Of their clerks and their assistants,
And how they in life were faring,
If they had enough to live on.
Then he turned to them, expounding:
"Greetings from our father sultan,
You're the flowers in his vase here,
Like an amulet he holds you
Under arm, you're like a treasure,
Like eyes under eyebrows guarded.
Now have come hard times upon us
For the kings and for the sultan,
All the more since Prince Nikolla
Sees no way out of his anguish,
Lost up in Cetinje's crags and
But a pipe to call his own there.
Rocks and trees feel pity for him.
Therefore did the kings take counsel,
They've reflected and decided
That he beg of Stamboul's sultan,
Plead to get a piece of wasteland,
Just a field down near Albania,
Just enough to keep him going,
For, by God, he's in dire straits now.
And the sultan, long life to him,
Was informed of their decision
And accorded Montenegro:
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia..."
"Oh, my God, he's made an error,"
Sputtered Ali Pasha, angry,
"Never will this venture prosper,
Albania's not some coin for beggars,
To be passed out to the kings there.
Our land, unlike other countries,
Was not conquered by the sultan,
Like some other Balkan nations.
Partner to us is the sultan,
One who's bound by faith and *besa*,
Sworn to recognize Albania,
To respect our ancient *Kanun*,
And not interfere with customs.
We have promised to fight for him

Should a foe make war, invading.
We've for our part kept our promise.
We made ready when he called us,
And in Yemen waged war for him,
And in Greece did we do battle,
Fought the Slavs and the Armenians,
For ourselves did we take nothing,
Nothing gained and no advantage.
Leaving house and home defenceless,
Thieves and robbers on our carpets.
In a noose hung those not guilty,
Infidels did steal our cattle,
Two cents' worth was manly honour,
One cigar a man's head severed.
Now it seems our father sultan
Wants to give away our country
Like a fig within a basket,
And to whom? To Montenegro!
Listen, pasha of the sultan,
Take your knapsack back to Stamboul,
This our land's a vicious country,
Thorns will wound you on the byways,
And, as to our nation's borders,
They were years ago established,
Marked by an Albanian sabre,
And that prince of Montenegro
He'll, God help me, not extract it
Even with the might of boar tusks."
What retorted then the pasha?
"Look, Albanian, have you gone mad,
Lost to faith and to the imam?
Turks do not speak in this manner.
Who're these partners of the sultan?
Pair of thieves and mountain bandits
To be caught and to be strung up,
Hogs for casting in the pigsty?
Were it not for Stamboul's sultan,
There would be no sunlight shining,
Would no kings on earth be living.
You claim you're the sultan's partners,
You Albanian mountain bandits?
There is no Albanian people,

Only Allah, sultan, Turkey!"
Then the watchmen's captain entered,
Seized, lined up the men before him,
Like a herd kept by a shepherd
When returning home at sunset,
Locked them in the horses' stable,
All the chieftains of Albania.
A vile deed was thus committed.
Not for true men cane and prison,
Better for them noose or sabre.
A gross act when perpetrated's
Only sure to breed more evil,
Flowing brooks become a torrent.
Thus the pasha made an error
Taking prisoner all the chieftains.
Earth did not explode with fury,
Spewing them back to the surface,
No one rushed to their assistance,
But they have their households, servants,
But they have their tribes and brothers.
Tribes and households will make clear that
They this evil will not suffer.
Thus will Mehmet Ali Pasha
One day face a great dilemma,
Shake his head between his two hands
For his crime against the chieftains.
That the pasha's in a tight spot
Is perhaps not so important.
I Abdullah Dreni pity,
Him, who's been host to a viper,
For the pasha is his guest there,
Spending day and nighttime with him,
With his repasts takes refreshment,
Roasts of meat for lunch and supper,
Mincemeat pastry every mealtime,
Feasts in bounty to his kneecaps,
True Albanian reception.
Yes, I fear Abdullah Dreni
May himself be in a tight spot
From the guest that he has let in.
For myself, I can't imagine
High Albania will not rally,

Will not move, the northern Highlands,
Will not act to free their leaders,
So that, too, the sultan's pasha
Comprehends the act committed
When he seized Albania's chieftains.
What of poor Abdullah Dreni?
Every guest must be protected.
He'll not put to shame Gjakova,
He who's skilled in firing rifles.
Thus I fear, it won't be long 'til
There'll be shooting in Gjakova.
For a war cry has been sounded
From Kaçanik to Qafa e Diellit,
Calling Sharri, Boletini,
Every hearth must send a man off
With his weapons to Gjakova.
Thither pushed Peja, Kosova,
Thither rushed Reka, Rogova,
Up in arms Gashi, Krasniqi,
Joined by Plava and Gucia,
To Gjakova's plain they swarmed up
Like an anthill by a tree trunk.
Lo, our foes deride us, saying
Ne'er together work Albanians!
Touch, though, their forefathers' country,
Dare infringe upon their honour,
They will congregate, will show you
That they're able to join forces,
Set upon their foe, united,
Like the wolves of Kaçanik when
Hunger strikes them in December.
Thus the pasha, Mehmet Pasha,
Had in Stamboul to himself thought
They would never reach agreement,
Now with his own eyes he's witnessed
All that manly youth a-blossom
On the hillsides of Gjakova.
Head in hands he's now regretted
What he's done, the act committed
'gainst the chieftains of Albania.
Mehmet asked Abdullah Dreni:
"Why have all these people gathered,

Are they members of a wedding,
Are they conscripts of the sultan
Setting off to join the army?"
"Long life to you," said Abdullah,
"They're no members of a wedding,
They're no conscripts of the sultan
Setting off to join the army.
No, they're lads from High Albania,
Here to talk to you, assembled,
Men that sent to you their chieftains,
Who did not return, are missing."
Hearing, scowled the pasha at him,
For he'd never dared imagine
That so many men would muster
To defend their cause and interests.
To the captain of the guards said:
"Quickly free Albania's chieftains,
They've been pardoned by the sultan,"
And the chieftains, freed, departed,
Asking not to meet the pasha.
To Gjakova's plain they hastened,
There united all the people,
And began to talk, discussing,
What to do in such a matter,
Being sold out by the sultan,
Being sold to Montenegro,
Sold out for a tray of shortcake,
For this pasha, Mehmet Pasha,
Who to them was sent from Stamboul
Had bestowed upon the prince their
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia.
All those present cried: "Our homeland
We will not abandon living,
As we are, we'd rather perish
Than be in the prince's clutches.
And that pasha sent from Stamboul,
Let us keep him here and judge him,
So that kings and sultan learn to
Keep their hands off of our country!"
To his feet rose Haxhi Zeka,
Stood up and addressed the people:
"Noble is the house of Dreni

Where the blind and lame are welcome,
And Abdullah Bey's a hero,
So we'll send a message, asking
If he'll give to us the pasha,
Or if he insists on guest rights."
Wise man is this Haxhi Zeka,
Wise men always speak with reason,
Guests cannot be handed over,
Be they strangers or Albanians,
Or the host will be dishonoured.
To the bey's door went the herald,
To Abdullah Bey explaining:
"Oh, Abdullah Bey, we greet you,
Salutations from the people,
Tell us, will you hand the scoundrel
Hiding in your home out to us?
We've a bone to pick now with him."
To him turned the bey, replying:
"I don't know and cannot tell you,
Cannot judge if he's a scoundrel,
For, alas, I did not quiz him,
That's not what my father taught me,
I'm not wont to ask my guests here
Who they are or what's their business,
Where they're going, where they've come from,
What their work is, what their wages.
Father taught me one thing only:
'Don't betray your guests, no, never!'
If the people should demand it,
I will give them all I'm heir to,
I will give up Highlands, lowlands,
I will give fields ploughed and fallow,
I will give up land and houses,
I will give them barns and fodder,
I will give them herds and sheep folds,
Goats and sheep will I give to them,
But my guests and honour never!"
They received the message from him.
Bey and guests were in the tower
Watched by fifty Fani tribesmen,
Men whose teeth could bite through iron,
Of them Oshi, son of Nuro,

Three hearts in him, what a hero,
Eyes like lightning, he'd not suffer
That a pasha break the *Kanun*,
That a bey destroy a village,
That an aga steal the food stocks.
What said Hoxha Korenica:
"Listen Oshi, son of Nuro,
You're from Fani, man of reason,
You know what the law requires.
Go and tell Abdullah Dreni
To hand out the sultan's pasha.
Let us have that scoundrel Mehmet,
For the *Kanun* of the mountains
Does not cover guests if hostile."
Oshi spoke from the embrasure:
"By my faith, Hoxha Effendi,
Me the bey has not assigned to
Talk of laws or to take captives,
We've no custom in this country
To hand out our guests on order,
Only by gunpowder, rifles.
I have learned that it's not seemly
For a host to give his guest up.
We'll forgive a family murder,
Yield to insult or a beating,
But we'll not betray a guest who
Bread and salt has eaten with us.
He's no meat sold by a butcher,
Dullo Dreni will not do it.
He will go through fire and water,
But he'll hand his guest to no one.
Proof of it's my *huta* flintlock."
And a shot rang from the *huta.*
Praise be to our God Almighty,
For the shot from Oshi's *huta*
O'er Çabrati Hill did ring out,
All of Gramoleci shuddered,
Raged the battle, weapons blazing,
As the men slew one another,
Killed Albanians one another
For a pasha of the sultan,
May God curse him and confound him!

All the foreigners who've come here
Always augured evil for us,
For our poor Albanian homeland.
Like a doom-portending raven,
Can you see the dark clouds chafing,
Here to rain upon Gjakova,
All because of that one stranger
Who has brought but evil with him?
Mired in war are the Albanians,
Firing arms at one another,
Some to kill the sultan's pasha,
Some to save the sultan's pasha,
'He's my guest,' says someone shouting,
'He's my foe,' screams out another.
Smashing one another's skulls in,
Squashing them like gherkins, pumpkins
Sold in Vraka at the market,
Should have sworn their faith and *besa*,
Should have fought the Turks and *shkjas* who've
Left our homeland weakened, withered,
We are killing one another.
Sad it is to see a guest slain,
Sad to see a herald slaughtered,
Of no crime the herald's guilty.
Worst of all's to kill your brother.
Therefore it's a real disaster
That our men are here entangled,
Caught up fighting one another
For a pasha of the sultan,
For a pasha who's a stranger,
Who has brought such evil with him.
So much blood's been spilt now, truly,
Men are cut down in the alleys,
In the lanes and on verandas,
Not to mention Oshi Nuro
At the embrasure in the tower,
Men, one hundred in their number,
By his hands did fall and perish,
Just to save a Turkish pasha,
Who's perchance some vagrant nomad.
Full three days and nights the battle,
Rifles ripping through the city,

'til at last, the tower taken,
Slaughtered was the Turkish pasha,
Slain while hiding in the pantry.
For the pasha I've no pity,
No compassion, will not mourn him,
Had they slain two, all the better,
But I mourn Abdullah Dreni,
Shaqir Curri and Ram Rrustemi,
And for Oshi, son of Nuro,
Who to save his guest did perish,
As our nation's custom has it.
Thereupon the people gathered,
Sent a message to the sultan,
"Listen to us, father sultan,
Listen to Kosova's people,
Send Albania a new pasha,
Who will punish evildoers,
Who will pave roads for the travellers,
Who will open mosques and churches
For the Muslims and the Christians.
Such a pasha you can grant us,
For we're in your hands, your subjects,
But don't parcel out Albania
As a present for Nikolla.
God be witness, father sultan,
Do not send us such a pasha
For he's certain to be slaughtered,
As we slaughtered Mehmet Ali,
'Harm no herald,' says the *Kanun*,
But, because we cannot get you,
We will slay your emissaries
If they ever try to sell us
Or bestow us on a stranger."
When the kings had heard the news of
What had happened in Gjakova,
Did they marvel at this people,
Who's this folk and who's this nation,
But a handful, poor and wanting,
(We do not know where they come from,
Nor their name have we heard spoken)
Who've ignored a royal order
And the word of Stamboul's sultan?

Canto 11

THE VAMPIRE

Prince Nikolla is enjoying a quiet evening at home in Cetinje with his wife Milena, boasting of his heroism and of future deeds of grandeur. Milena urges restraint. She serves him wine, tobacco and roasted chestnuts before retiring for the night. She also happens to mention that the children had been frightened to go to bed since they had seen a vampire the evening before. Prince Nikolla dismisses the belief in vampires and ghosts as childish nonsense. After a last glass of wine and a smoke on his pipe, the prince retires to his bedchamber himself. In the night, a vampire appears before him. It is the ghost of the slain Mehmet Ali Pasha telling the prince of his demise at the hands of the Albanians and urging him to take possession of the Albanian Highlands. The ghost vanishes, as the poet tells us, leaving behind a stink which was long to linger in Cetinje. The prince jumps out of bed and sets off to find his general, Mark Milani, to lead Montenegrin forces into Albania.

Prince Nikolla, clever fellow's,
Having a grand time this evening,
Happy with his wife conversing,
At the fireside while sitting,
Now that they are done with dinner,
Sent the children to their chambers,
Some were squawking, others whining.
Thus now, having finished dining,
Lounging there before the fireplace,
In his drawers, no belt or buckle,
Prince Nikolla lit his pipe up,
And to one side lay there smoking,
And a glass of wine enjoying,
Wine jug resting at the window.
Roasted chestnuts was he eating,
Which Milena with her own hands
As his wife did shell and give him,
Just as custom would demand it.
Then in idle conversation
To his wife he started boasting:
"To the Turks I've really shown it,
Turned upon them, struck back at them,

Now the Seven Kings respect me,
Serbs and Greeks are fearful of me.
I won't save them from Bulgaria,
Rather I will conquer Mostar,
Capture Shkodra and pluck Prizren,
Then a real king they will call me,
I'll my palace build in Shkodra.
You, my dear, a queen I'll make you,
And that smock you won't be sporting,
Nor that headpiece will you put on.
All in gold adorned you'll glitter,
On your head a crown will glisten,
Dazzling at a day's march distance.
You will never find a hero
Greater than me on this planet."
In her sleeve Milena snickered,
Hearing all the prince's bragging,
Though she hardly hearkened to him,
Knowing all the nonsense prattled
By the prince, when wine imbibing.
That is why she sat in silence,
Knitting stockings with her needles.
Later though she turned and uttered:
"Poor me, husband, what has happened?
Hardly could I tuck in bed the
Children for they'd seen a vision,
That did frighten and upset them,
They refused to sleep without me."
"They saw what?" the prince inquired,
"That they would not sleep without you,
Though we're in the room beside them?"
"I don't know," replied Milena,
"But from what the children told me,
We were eating, having dinner,
They, while playing in the hallway,
Saw amongst the jugs of water
At the sink a figure squatting.
Like a Turk he wore a turban,
Pipe in hand, beads in the other,
Had a hide slung o'er his shoulder,
Pallid face and lips contorted,
Flames spewed from his eyes and ears, and

At the children did he snigger.
Poor me, could it be a vampire?
For it's rumoured in the town now
That a Turk, a moneylender,
Great deceiver and imposter,
Somewhere down near Samoborr, and
From the grave's come as a vampire,
Terrifying, should one see him."
"Nonsense, have you lost your mind now?"
There's no vampire on the earth here.
Who knows what they set their eyes on,
Thinking Abraham's the devil,
Or perhaps they saw some scoundrel
In a guise dressed up to scare them,
Masquerading as a vampire.
Those who die and who are buried
Never come back to the planet.
You're the ones, 'tis you, the women,
Who support such superstitions
When you meet and when you mingle,
Talking nonsense, spreading gossip,
When you speak to one another.
Wife, there are no vampires, witches,
I've my hands full with the living,
Let the dead be dead and done with."
"What? No witches and no vampires?"
Wondered to herself the woman,
"I don't know about the vampires,
For I've never ever seen one,
I've just heard the people talking.
But of witches, I assure you,
I've encountered many women
In Cetinje here among us,
(Some of whom may be your cousins...)
Who like sparks at night go flying.
Into houses do they enter
From the rooftop down the chimney,
And do suffocate the people
Who then tell you in the morning
That a nightmare did befall them,
Yet it was a witch that got them.
They bring evil to the paupers,

When they in the night meander."
"Fairy tales!" replied Nikolla,
"Tales you're telling, nonsense natt'ring,
Nowhere are there any witches
Neither in the towns nor hamlets...
Tell you what, wife, listen to me,"
Said the prince thereafter, grinning,
"If you're sure that there are witches,
Let me get my hands upon them,
Let them gulp me, let them swallow,
Choose some, though, with teeth and molars,
Not some hag beside the chimney,
Who's no teeth for gnawing leek leaves."
"Come on now, you wretched fellow!
All your life you've nattered nonsense"
To him did respond Milena,
"I'm chagrined about the children
Who were petrified this evening.
You talk whimsy about witches.
Fear them as you wish, those witches,
I'll to bed for it is late now,
And the children, too, are waiting.
I must rise tomorrow early,
As I have to do the housework.
If a housewife is not able
At her chores to be a model,
Then the premises won't prosper."
Thus the wife spoke with displeasure,
Heaping ashes on the embers,
Socks and wool threw in her basket,
Had no mind for conversation,
In a tone of irritation
Bid the prince "good night," departing
Off to bed beside her children
(He, now drunk, still longed to chatter),
There among her sons and daughters,
All like melons 'neath the bedclothes.
In his whiskers laughed Nikolla
And to finish off the matter,
Went and filled with wine his chalice,
Drank, and down the hatch it vanished,
Placed the wine jug by the window,

Put his pipe back in the cupboard,
After shaking it to clean it,
And retired to the bedroom,
Tired and weary as he was now,
Both from work and from the wine. He
Had imbibed more than he should have.
Like a hare his thoughts took flight and
Undelayed he soundly slumbered,
In his slumber loudly snoring.
It was at the midnight hour
When awakened Prince Nikolla
And espied within his chamber
On its feet a human figure
With a beard that was a span long,
Like a tub did droop its belly,
In a winding sheet its body,
Lurid face of brimstone colour.
From it did an earthy smell rise.
At the prince it stood there staring
Out of eyes so sad and mournful,
Eyes like shards of glass when shattered.
On his face and on his members,
On the winding sheet in places
There were several bilious bloodstains
Causing horror to the watcher,
In them dried-up pus had thickened.
Frightened was the prince to see it,
All his body shook and shivered,
Up on end his hair was standing,
Thereupon his breathing faltered,
Sweat now soaking all his body,
There he lay so piteous, staring,
That he couldn't move a muscle,
Just as if his back were broken,
Such the fear and horror in him.
Step by step now stalked the vampire,
Ever closer to his bedside.
Prince Nikolla on the lookout,
Stretched his hand out for his pistol
Hanging underneath the icon.
He was on the verge of firing
When the vampire ventured to him:

"Do not touch that evil weapon,
I've not come with ill intentions,
Not to harass or to harm you,
I have come here to inform you
Of some matters which, it happens,
Would be good for you to know of.
This, at least, is how I see it.
I am Mehmet Ali Pasha,
Sent by the sultan to Albania,
To accord to Montenegro,
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia,
As was in Berlin decided.
But when I got to Gjakova,
There, misfortune fell upon me,
All the chieftains of Albania,
Ali Pasha of Gucia,
Swore a solemn oath that they, both
Young and old, would take to battle,
Men and women would die fighting,
But would not give up the Highlands.
Thus it happened when I got there
All Kosova rose to battle,
Little Peja and Rogova.
In Abdullah Dreni's mansion
They encircled and besieged me.
There they slew me, oh what horror!
There they bathed in blood my body,
As you see me with your own eyes.
You've no choice now in the matter,
You yourself must take the Highlands.
Cheek to rifle you must wrest it,
For without you causing bloodshed,
For without you torching tribe lands,
Will Albania not fall to you,
For that country's now a nation."
"Oh my goodness," said Nikolla,
"If Stamboul has not succeeded
In according me those Highlands,
Much time will, I think, be needed,
As you've seen yourself since having
Had in blood bathed all your body,
Arms alone won't win Albania."

Mehmet Ali started frowning,
Sparks snapped off in anger as he
Gnashed his teeth in his annoyance.
To the prince he then responded:
"More than one skull will you have to
Split in war and cause much torment
Ere you reach your goal, objective,
Ere you enter, take Albania.
For its people, I discovered,
Are heroic, die they'd rather
Than submit themselves to serfdom.
Nonetheless, if you are stealthy
And assault them in the nighttime
When they are dispersed, divided,
I deem with a bit of bloodshed
That you'll manage to subdue them
And will enter as a victor.
Therefore gather up an army,
Swiftly march on Plava, Gucia,
In the dark of night attacking.
When you've bathed in blood then Plava,
And you've taken, grabbed Gucia,
Aim and set upon the Highlands,
Seize in hand your sword and firebrand,
And wipe out the Highland people,
For if you do not efface them,
To your hands will ne'er slip Shkodra.
Do not hesitate a moment,
For the Albanians are awakening,
Have begun to write their language,
Have begun to speak of nation,
Speak of nation and of freedom,
Say autonomy and freedom,
And I deem, it won't be long 'til
They will seek their independence,
Free and sovereign like the Serbs are,
Like the Greeks are, like Bulgarians,
For some other king may scheme to
Try to rouse and stimulate them,
Both with money and with speeches,
That they leave, abandon Turkey.
If that happens, you'll no longer

Be the one to make decisions.
Someone else will rise, take over,
Place the points upon the scoreboard,
He will dominate the country,
Be the one to move the landmarks.
But if you should act this minute
And should seize, invade the Highlands
(Something that you've always longed for),
You'll succeed, and what is more then,
With some time and some deception,
You will even enter Shkodra.
You should know, my good Nikolla,
Stamboul's made a resolution
To award to you and Serbia,
And the King of Greece, to grant him,
Grant to Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians
All the lands of the Albanians
Rather than accord them freedom."
Thus the vampire ceased his speaking
To Nikolla, adding nothing.
Through the wall did he then vanish,
Lingered did a stink behind him,
Long they smelled it in Cetinje.
To his feet rose Prince Nikolla,
Donned his garments and his weapons,
And departed in the moonlight,
Off to meet with Mark Milani,
Mark Milani to encounter,
And with him prepare an army
To be sent to plunder Plava,
Sent to bathe in blood Gucia,
Torch and pillage all the Highlands,
And to crush, destroy Albania.
May the Lord confound their plans and
Wipe Nikolla out and others
Who would dare deceive or trouble
Our fair homeland, our Albania.

Canto 12

MARASH UCI

This canto was the first of the 'Highland Lute' to be published and contains much memorable verse. It revolves around the figure of Marash Uci, once a valiant warrior of the sultan and now an aging shepherd full of wisdom and experience. Up on the high alpine meadows, Marash Uci counsels the younger shepherds to hold to the manly traditions of their tribal culture and always to keep their *besa*, their word of honour. Over the mountains he then journeys to visit Çun Mula, standard-bearer (Alb. *bajraktar*) of the Hoti tribe, and calls upon him to assemble the chiefs at the Church of St John's in Brigje.

In the shadow of a hazel
Did three shepherds gather resting,
Two had sheep, and one, goats with him,
One was old and two were youngsters:
Marash Uci, boys of Cali,
Swift those lads like mountain eagles.
Marash, son of Uc Mehmeti,
Far and wide had crossed the oceans,
Seen the vast realms of the sultan,
Starting from the lands of Hoti
To where bread bakes in the sunlight.
For when Marash was a young man,
He had joined the sultan's army,
Hands on weapons, soul in fervour,
As is custom in Albania.
Mighty hero like a *zana*,
To him were his weapons parents,
Sabre father, flintlock mother,
Brother, sister, his two pistols
Fashioned in Stamboul like serpents.
Many people sought his counsel,
Crowds came to him and they begged him
For a battle cry or judgment,
Or for loot from Montenegro,
For whenever he was leader
Did he prove himself a hero.
But with age his hair turned snow-white

And the strength of limbs did leave him.
Then he put aside his faithful
Weapons that in former times had
Been the pride of brave Arbënia,
And set off for mountain pastures,
Herding sheep with Cali's youngsters.
Mashi, to the men of Hoti,
Spoke of deeds he once accomplished
In the old days, feats of courage,
How Albanians fell for freedom
And to keep their word would perish,
Died to keep their true religion.
Of the *oras, zanas* spoke he,
Told them of their works of wonder,
Of the moon when snatched by vampires,
Of *kulshedras* in their combat
With the *drangues* in our country.
And he had encountered *drangues*
Who were born of human beings
In Râna e Hjedhun and Ura e Vezirit.
Therefore all the shepherds loved him,
To his words they closely listened,
Words of combat, words of counsel.
What, oh Lord's now wrong with Mashi?
Why's he sombre, why's he silent?
Is a wolf now in his sheep pen?
Have his fields now gone to fallow?
Has with guests misfortune found him?
Has he now no food to feed them?
No, there's no wolf in his sheep pen,
Never has Marashi left them,
Left his sheep and herds unguarded.
Had he caught a wolf, he'd slay it,
There's no lender at his doorstep,
He's a hundred sheep to pay them,
Has no debts his son must settle,
To his guests he's very generous,
Nothing but the best he gives them,
And no fields does he leave fallow.
I don't know what's wrong with Mashi.
He spoke to the younger herdsmen:
"Listen to my words, oh young men,

I today a job must finish,
Must be off and cannot stay here.
Once it's fled the cage, my fellows,
Once the bird is off a-winging,
It's too late to catch, retrieve it,
As you know from the old saying.
Don't know how long I'll be gone for,
Whether one week or for several,
God knows, and I cannot tell you.
Should perchance the Lord forbid me
To regain these shady meadows,
And recount the feats of courage
Of the golden age behind us,
Listen, fellows, hearken closely,
By the Lord of clouds and sunshine,
Hearken to this piece of counsel,
One request I have to ask you:
Keep an eye upon your sheep flocks,
Never loaded arms surrender,
Do not quarrel with your comrades,
Do not fight or fidget with them,
For in need, they are your brothers,
Both with weapons and with money.
You should ne'er insult a stranger,
Make him welcome, feed him dinner,
As is custom in Albania,
But take care you don't believe him!
And another thought I'll give you:
Let the anger in your hearts out,
Never break up an engagement,
Do not row on troubled waters,
Never cross a ford that's not one,
Do not tread on slippery flagstones,
Keep away from dogs with rabies,
Do not go near wanton women,
Love above all else your homeland,
Keep your pledges and your *besa*."
Thus spoke Mashi as he stood up,
Girded on his belt and jacket,
And his ruthless arms he put on,
Arms which did not know surrender.
Mashi'd kept a Vlora flintstone,

Lightning flashed when Mashi flicked it,
After which did rumble thunder
As when storms do strike the mountains.
"Farewell," he bade Cali's lads, placed
O'er his shoulder the *breshana*,
And he vanished in the beech grove,
In the beech grove on the hillside,
In an hour he was in Starja.
Where, oh Lord, was Mashi going,
Crossing cliffs and mountain torrents,
Pressing on at such a pace that
You would think him under twenty?
Marash set out for Gjenoviq,
There to visit, meet Çun Mula,
At Çun Mula's austere fortress
Where the blind and lame eat dinner,
There with Hoti's tribal leaders,
Sons in sequence had been chieftains.
Marash hiked from noon to sunset
'til he finally reached Gjenoviq,
Reached Gjenoviq, Çun's stone tower,
In the village, that fair *kulla*.
"Glad you're here, Çun, son of Mula,"
Uttered Mashi at the entrance.
"Welcome to you, Marash Uci,"
Çun responded: "What has made you
Leave your herds and flocks behind to
Bear the scorching heat of midday?
Must I fear some evil's happened
For I see you've brought your weapons?"
"Shepherd's word, no, nothing's happened.
How are things here in the Highlands?
God will help us and be with us
If we do not breach our *besa*.
Yesterday I was in Shkodra,
There a favoured friend to visit,
Whom you've known yourself for ages,
Him I gave my word of honour
That I'd meet the chiefs of Hoti
And with them discuss a matter
In our church, tonight, no later.
Send word to the local chieftains

That they come to meet in Brigje.
I must first go home and sift through
Some affairs, some private matters.
I'll tomorrow go to Shkodra,
To that friend, may God be with him,
To assist our wretched Highlands."
Thus spoke Mashi and departed,
Did not rest among the pine trees,
For he had no time to squander.
Then cried out Çun Mula, saying:
"Oh great God, on us have mercy!
One of two things must have happened:
We've been mustered to the army,
Or there's war with Montenegro.
May the will of God best guide us,
Hoti has a lucky *ora.*
I'll send for the local chieftains,
Have them here tonight assembled,
Then we'll talk and weigh the matter,
Things will be as fate foretells them.

Canto 13

AT THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN'S

The chiefs of the Hoti tribe have assembled at the Church of St John's. Çun Mula opens the meeting during which Marash Uci holds a long and moving speech about Albania's difficult relations with the Turks, tribal autonomy and the ancient Code of Lekë Dukagjini. Now things have changed, he adds. Europe, that aging whore, has betrayed the Albanians, since the lands of Hoti, Gruda, Plava and Guci have been given by the Congress of Berlin to the Prince of Montenegro. The elders of the tribe resolve to go to war to defend the Highlands, and make Çun Mula their commander. All the men of the tribe, young and old, take to arms, leaving their homes, fields and flocks in the care of the womenfolk.

In the sky the sun set, moon rose,
On Veleçik chirped the *zana*:
"Oh, you mountains of Albania,
On which once perched freedom's eagle,
In that golden age now vanished,
You let not the foe approach you.
Both the slopes and torrents know it,
Both the woods and cliffs bear witness,
How much blood the foe left flowing
Everywhere, throughout our homeland,
Blood spilt by a flashing sabre
Brandished by Albania's fighters,
Lightning from the peaks of Sharri.
Were marauding hands e'er able
In that blessed age to plunder
(Age with bloody tears wept over)
Of Albania's soil a handful?
No, no, never, all had risen,
Some Lekë, some George Castriota
Would have leapt up, arms triumphant,
And have lopped that thievish hand off,
Feats to be forever told as
Long as moon and stars do orbit.
But the times have changed, the seasons,
O'er this languid land clash rifles.

Off the poor man's tears folk live now,
Tears of sweat upon the tilled soil,
Off the blacksmith broiled at anvil,
Or on foaming waves the sailor
Trying wife at home to nourish
While for bread do beg her children,
She perhaps must let them yammer
For she has no food to feed them,
Folk who none but gold do worship,
Want to parcel out their poor land,
Dearly which in blood was paid for
By Albanian farmers paltry,
Ruthless folk, I damn and curse them!
You ask why? Well, Europe wished it.
Europe, aging whore, it's you that
On your word and God have trampled.
Is it sign of all your culture
That you parcel out Albania
Just to rear the cubs of Russia?
Is this how you've paid them back now,
All those men who died to save you,
Fallen, slain up in the hills while
You yourself, too weak, kept silent?
Thou who kindled fire for sunlight,
Thou who drew the spheres of heaven,
From the bones of our dead fighters,
Men who perished for their homeland,
Cause to rise now hale young heroes,
Who'll not let an inch of homeland
Fall into those Slavic clutches,
Ere they bathe in blood the foemen!"
Blessed *zana* of Veleçik,
You who at the foe hurl curses,
You who wish well Highland fighters,
You who mourn Albania's sorrows,
Mourn that land which in past ages
Was for faith and arms remembered,
Was esteemed by all our tribesmen
Where the sun shines and the moon glows,
Now, behold, look how she's faltered,
How she's languishing and weeping
In the dust, by men derided.

But that spark of courage, *zana*,
Is not dead up in the mountains,
Even now, upon occasion
Does it sparkle, flash like lightning,
Faithful arms are not abandoned,
For Arbënia, noble woman,
Always brings forth new young heroes
Who in valour for Albania,
For their word and blithe religion,
View as birth their own extinction.
Can you see those fellows coming
Who near Brigje o'er the rock cliffs
Like a pack of wolves this night are
Stealing, t'wards the Church advancing?
Yes, they are the chiefs of Hoti
Come to swear an oath by God to
Save, defend as men their country,
And do honour to the Highlands.
For Çun Mula on his courser
Had informed the Highland chieftains,
Had sent word to every household
That they meet in tribal council.
With all waiting in a circle
Çun did thus begin the meeting:
"Speak now, Mashi, let us hear you,
I've assembled all the chieftains,
All the men you can rely on.
On the ground we've laid our weapons
As would ancient customs have it."
Mashi calmly spoke, announcing:
"Listen to my words, oh heroes,
Words before the Lord I utter
To you, Castriota's scions.
Over forty decades have we
Served the sultan, paid him homage,
Some as soldiers, some in corvee,
Arms in hand in fervent ardour,
Some with shoes and others barefoot,
Bread in knapsacks, home - the hard soil,
Earth our mattress, stone our pillow,
Last to flee and first to perish.
From the start they called us heroes,

For we feared not kings or sultan.
And to an extent the sultan
Liked the service we provided,
He'd not suffer our extinction,
Doled us out a drop of freedom,
Let us wield our faithful weapons
To maintain our faith and customs,
To defend these mountain ranges,
To preserve our ancient *Kanun*
And protect our people's honour.
He then opened mosques and churches
For the Muslims and the Christians,
He remitted tithes and taxes,
Let us keep our ancient culture,
Save when we ourselves did break the
Kanun come from our forefathers.
Thus we spent our lives in freedom,
In the Highlands and the lowlands,
Tending to our herds and farming,
Bending to our toil, and living,
Celebrating old traditions,
Rites for burials and weddings
As did teach us our forefathers.
But, alas, so much affliction's
In these mountains, stony valleys,
In these peaks and in our passes
Where from ancient times 'til now has
Ruled the *Kanun* of the Mountains,
Where such handsome youths were brought up.
Comely lads are Hoti's Lekas,
Famous for their word and weapons,
Famous for their wisdom, manhood,
As is custom in Albania.
For now Shkodra's journals tell us
To the *shkja* these wretched mountains
Must start bowing in submission
Now since Moscow, God confound her,
Did prevail at Berlin's Congress
That Cetinje's prince be granted
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia.
Now the Prince of Montenegro's
Brought his cannons, raised his army

In three days to take the Highlands.
Seems the Highlands have been orphaned,
Seems Albania's been abandoned."
So spoke Mashi. Hoti's chieftains,
As if struck by God with lightning,
Pallid stood there, speechless gaping,
Had you stabbed, you'd see no bleeding,
On the ground were fixed their glances,
Not a word they dared to utter.
Then at last did Mashi speak up:
"What now, men? Without resistance
Shall we give up faith and custom,
Leave without a shot our towers,
Hand the prince the Highlands, lowlands?"
"By the God we worship, Nicky,"
Gjeto Marku spoke in anger,
"You'll not enter Hoti, Gruda,
Should but maids survive among us
Whom the prince would cause to vanish,
Should he torch the hills and valleys,
We'll not let him shame Albania
Long as deeds of courage linger.
All the Lekas of the Highlands,
From age seven up to seventy,
All will perish for their homeland.
Save they dress me in a *jubleta*
I'll not show the prince submission.
But let Çun speak, standard-bearer,
I'll be first to listen to him."
Pensive then, arose Çun Mula,
Thus did he begin to utter:
"Men, we've nothing more to wait for,
Let's gird on our trusted weapons,
Stop the prince's men advancing,
Even though we pass away all,
We perhaps are just a handful,
We perhaps are lacking bullets,
But, no matter, for the fighters
In that golden age behind us,
Fighters of George Castriota
Never counted up their soldiers,
Sheep you count and goats you add up,

But not heroes born with weapons,
Heroes bound by word of honour.
Such men have been known at times to
Save their honour with one bullet.
So lads, let us leap to arms, our
Country has a lucky *ora,*
With it, too, is God Almighty.
No, he'll plant no flag in Hoti,
Not expand his Montenegro,
By the arms my father gave me,
Save he hang us on a meat hook!
Let us swear as faith would have it,
(Those who break faith, be confounded!)
We'll stand or be struck by lightning,
As here once fought our forefathers,
Who have never been forgotten."
Thus spoke Çun, the standard-bearer,
Then fell to his knees, the first one,
Swore an oath, his tears were streaming,
By the Koran, seven angels,
By his son's head, mountain *oras,*
By the name of God Almighty,
That without him dead and buried
With his son and son's bride with him,
That without his cattle stolen,
That without his home in ashes,
He'd not yield to Montenegro.
After him the others followed,
Swearing all, the chiefs of Hoti,
On the Code of Dukagjini,
On St John's Church, candles holy,
On saints Anthony and Nich'las,
On the Cross of Christ, the blessed:
To the prince, unless they perished,
They'd not bow or show submission!
Once again did Çun address them:
"Listen now, men, furnish fighters
For the Bridge of Rrzhanica,
There to hold up Montenegro
'til the tribe learns of the matter.
I'll choose twenty Martini rifles,
Riflemen heard in Cetinje,

Them I'll move to Rrzhanica.
On the prince they'll open fire,
Should he entertain the thought of
Coming here, crossing the border,
Dispatch Gjeto to Traboina
To send word to Dedë Gjo' Luli
That he raise his clan to arms and
Route his men to Rrzhanica.
You now, each and every chieftain,
Spread the word to all your clansmen
Ere the sun comes up tomorrow,
That the sultan's men in Hoti
From age seven up to seventy,
Shoulder arms and sharpen sabres,
Hie their herds up to Veleçik.
Should they hear in Rrzhanica
Rifles firing, they must hither,
Let it be there as God wishes,
Hoti has a lucky *ora.*
Mashi, set off with the sunrise,
To the very heart of Shkodra!
Greetings give to Hodo Pasha,
Tell him there to arm the people,
Tell him they must wield their weapons,
And defend the sultan's glory,
And defend, protect our homeland,
That they fight with Montenegro.
To that friend convey our greetings,
Let him publish in the journals
That the fighters of Albania
Ne'er will give up while they're living,
Without blood, their fathers' country,
They'll not shame George Castriota,
Castriota, lightning hero.
Let him write that there are heroes
Who for country and religion
View as birth their own extinction
When they're under oath united,
When they've sworn by God and plighted,
As are all of Hoti's chieftains.
Let us part now, pleasant journey!
For the cocks of morn are crowing

And we have no time to waste here.
No, a hero mustn't dither
When a judgment is forthcoming
That he die or be a victor."
So spoke Çun, the men departed.
Who will next, Lord, own this country?

Canto 14

AT THE BRIDGE OF RRZHANICA

Riza Pasha, commander of the Turkish fortress in Shkodra, looks northwards and sees fog hovering over the lake. That is no fog, the mufti tells him, but the smoke of gunpowder from the bloody battle being waged between Montenegrin forces under Mark Milani and the Hoti and Gruda Highlanders. The poet calls upon the *zana* to tell him the number of Slav forces, which are then enumerated in Homeric fashion. Two thousand seven hundred Montenegrin troops converge on the Rrzhanica Bridge, faced by twenty Highlanders, including Halil Haka and Palokë Gjoka, and twenty rifles. The ensuing battle is portrayed in all its heroic detail until the Slavs are defeated and Mark Milani is forced to take flight.

Riza Pasha from the castle
Gazed out: "God, what am I seeing?
Heavy fog's descended over
Rrzhanica, Podgorica,
Looks like rain will soon be falling,
Bringing precious help to farmers."
"Greetings to you," said the mufti,
"That's no fog up in the Highlands,
Rrzhanica, Podgorica,
That's the smoke of the gunpowder.
Gruda's lads and Hoti's Lekas
Are at war with Montenegro,
Which has gathered cannons, army
So that it can seize the Highlands.
Mark Milani is their leader."
Yes, it was today at sunrise,
Mark Milani, *drangue* hero,
Mounted on his dappled courser,
To his trumpeters gave order
"Toot the trumpets, call the army,
Let it march upon the Highlands."
Drums were pounded, trumpets sounded,
To its feet did rush the army,
On the battlefield it gathered
Facing Mark Milani's courser.

On his horse did Mark address them:
"Listen to my words, oh fighters,
We are marching on the Highlands,
Russia, at that Berlin Congress,
To Cetinje's prince accorded
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia.
We have donned today our weapons
And will occupy those mountains.
Yet there's one thing I'm afraid of,
They'll not give up without bloodshed.
Steel yourselves thus for the battle,
We'll be fighting lightning heroes,
Who for country and religion
View as birth their own extinction.
But, my Montenegrin warriors,
If you're true sons of your fathers,
Who did strive for faith and freedom,
Swooping down like light-winged eagles
On our mountain peaks so ancient,
You will finally get to Hoti
And you'll penetrate the Highlands.
You will plant your flag on Hoti,
Be the pride of Montenegro,
Hurrah, lads, may luck be with you,
For good fortune will precede us!"
Thus spoke Mark, the trumpets pealed and
All the army left for Hoti.
Oh, good *zana*, I invoke you,
Tell me, do you know how many
Soldiers follow Mark Milani,
And the voyvodes, what their names are?
For I truly do not know them,
They are *shkjas* and I Albanian,
Blood and faith divide us, we are
Born for hating one another,
Earth and sky are cleft between us.
Look, that *çeta* in the vanguard,
All young lads, eight hundred rifles,
They're the men of Ljubotinj, they're
Paltry, wretched men to look at,
But they're heroes, strong as *zanas*,
Who've left many mothers sonless,

Who've made weep our Muslim women,
Who have burnt down manors, towers,
Been the pride of Montenegro.
(Hate them, but of them speak justice!),
They call Ceroviq their leader
Of the noble house of Nikshiq,
Hirsute fighter with black whiskers,
Known as Montenegro's *ora*.
Brings Cetinje a thousand rifles,
Brings Njegush and the surroundings,
Mountain hawks, those lads so limber,
Vukotiq they've named their leader,
Man of strength and man of reason,
Whom the prince of Montenegro'd
Rather keep than his own eyesight.
Nikshiq brought nine hundred rifles,
'twas the number that the voyvode,
Matiniq, who is their leader,
Asked for to invade the Highlands.
Matiniq, you handsome hero,
You who are a mountain falcon,
Did you really think, believe
That with nine hundred rifles only,
You would conquer all the Highlands?
Did you really deem, poor devil,
That the Highlands had gone sterile,
That they had no lads to offer,
That they had but feeble maidens
Sitting at their looms and distaffs?
Careful now! Today you'll find out
At the Bridge of Rrzhanica
Not just maids are in the Highlands,
When you hear the Slavic women
Wailing, should you have the luck to
Take your head and ears back with you,
When you hear those women weeping,
When you hear them curse the rifles
Which have made of brides but widows,
Left so many without bridegrooms,
Since those rifles roared like thunder!
Montenegro's army gathered,
Ever nearing like the storm clouds

There to beat upon the Highlands.
Down to Rrzhanica led them
Thither Captain Mark Milani,
He amongst the kings was famous
For his quill and for his sabre.
But I know not what will happen
At the Bridge of Rrzhanica
For it's narrow, Mark's on horseback,
And I fear that he'll not cross it.
Hear me, God, up in the heavens,
You who know our human worries,
You constructed, you created
This wide earth, the lofty star fields,
To encompass all of mankind,
No need here for crowding, shoving,
No need here for any envy.
What's Albania done, I wonder,
Why is Mark Milani coming
With his cannons, his *novicas*,
On his way to Rrzhanica?
You who save, protect the feeble,
Cleave a sabre in the middle
When it's brandished by a traitor,
Give our folk now your protection,
Lay waste to the foe, and crush now
All who plan such evil doings.
With the troops in Rrzhanica,
Once again did toll the trumpets,
There they paused to rest, recover.
Mark Milani, *drangue* hero,
Went to survey with his field glass,
"God Almighty, what has happened
On those slopes beyond the bridge there?
Are they eagles, mountain falcons?
They're not eagles, mountain falcons
You're observing with your field glass,
They're the Lekas of the Highlands,
Halil Haka, Palokë Gjoka,
Twenty fighters, lads unequalled,
Here seconded by Çun Mula
Waiting now to open fire.
Palokë Gjoka, mighty soldier,

Raised his hand and crossed his forehead:
"God Almighty, whom we worship,
Look, how many *shkjas* are at us,
Prince of Montenegro's kin who've
Come to fetch that maid, the Highlands,
But I don't know where the ring is.
By my arms, we will not yield her,
By the *Kanun* we've no right to
Yield a maid before engagement.
Therefore, men, now don your weapons,
From these cliffs we'll make a graveyard,
Firing at the prince our rifles,
Sending back the bride's attendants.
For a pile of bones we'll never
Put to shame George Castriota,
Not this day dishonour Hoti,
Not ourselves disgrace or sully.
To its feet has risen Europe,
Kings and sultan stand there watching
How Albanians, *shkjas* do battle;
Better dead, bemoaned and buried
Than be scolded, cursed as cowards,
Than in Slavic yoke to languish!"
Then while Palokë still was speaking,
Rifles shot, the earth did shudder,
"Bravo," shouted Palokë Gjoka,
"Who boomed at the three battalions?"
Marka Kola, lightning fury.
First to fire was Marka Kola
Every bullet claimed a victim,
Shot the sultan's Martini rifle,
Slaying Mark Milani's bugler,
Mark himself had been the target,
Yet 'twas not his time to perish.
To the ground fell dead the bugler,
Ricocheted then twenty rifles,
Twenty *huta* flintlocks fired,
Lightning flashing from the fighters.
"To your feet, men!" hollered loudly,
Giving orders, Mark Milani,
"For the Highlands have attacked us."
To its feet did rise the army,

Cannons roared as did *novicas*,
Cem and Rrzhanica rumbled.
"Woe," the *zana* of the mountains
Cried for lads about to perish,
Comely heroes, boys of Hoti,
All those sons of Castriota,
"Curse upon you, oh Çun Mula,
That you've caused such lads to perish
In a Montenegrin ambush."
Silence, *zana*, on that mountain!
These your heroes will not falter,
Handsome heroes, Hoti's Lekas,
All those sons of Castriota,
When they've sworn by the Almighty,
Rifle powder cannot touch them,
They will have the stuff to fight on.
Should their time come, though, to perish,
Should they give their lives in fighting,
Others will arise to venge them,
Çun will never be far from them.
Shots were fired at Rrzhanica,
Novicas, Martini rifles,
Battle cry in Hoti, Gruda.
Like a storm on mountain pastures,
Bolts of thunder, claps of lightning,
Bringing rain and hail a-drumming,
So the lads on Rrzhanica,
Zanas' dwelling, fell rebuffing
Treachery from Montenegro.
Like a torrent after rainfall,
Down the peaks loudly cascading,
Clumps of earth and boulders tumbling,
Taking with it all the bridges,
Tearing walls down 'round the ploughed land,
Breaking hearts of all the farmers.
Thus to battle rushed the Highlands.
God Almighty, what a vision,
All the time with cannons crackling,
Thund'rous roar, Martini rifles,
Novicas in Rrzhanica.
Smoke spread thickly, stopped the soldiers
There from seeing one another,

Oh! You vultures, swarthy ravens,
You will find here easy pickings,
Here where heroes lunge at heroes,
Much smoked meat left over for you.
Many mothers will be weeping,
Many brides will now be widows,
Many girls will go unmarried,
Many maids bereft of husbands,
For the men that they were promised
To, another bride will marry
At the Bridge of Rrzhanica,
In their hearts they'll wed a bullet!
Blessed he who for his fathers
Dies as these men fall and falter.
Do not weep, oh Coli's mother,
That your falcon son has perished,
That your boy should bleed in battle.
Not for vile deeds was he fashioned,
But to be a lightning hero,
Fighting for his faith and country,
He's been born, he did not perish.
Just before his life he offered
Did your Coli well avenge us,
Slew two *shkjas* as brave as *zanas*,
Clad in garments of a captain,
One was Krista, one was Rista.
Slavic mothers in Cetinje,
Let them mourn Matiniq slain by
Gjeto Marku, fury-hearted.
But more than by Gjeto slaughtered,
This wretch caused himself to perish.
What brought him to Rrzhanica
With his cannons and *novicas?*
Did he want to split the land here
That his Slavic father'd left him?
Why's the mountain *zana* weeping?
"Woe, poor Tringa mourns her brother,
Yes, she's grieving for that brother
Who's now died in Rrzhanica
With no sister to be with him,
With no sister to assist him,
Tend the wounds upon his body."

Vat Cubaku's son, Nikë Daka,
Handsome lad he, like a lily,
His first whiskers have just sprouted.
Like a bear, when sheep fold stalking,
Wounded but not dead entirely,
Rages wilder in the sheep fold,
Ne'er abandoning its prey there,
Thus was Nikë, that lad of daring,
Stormed the bridge so he could cross it,
Cross it and attack the army,
Looked like he'd annihilate them.
But they felled him, two *novicas,*
In his chest did bide two bullets,
Slew him there at Rrzhanica.
What did Halil Haka cry out?
"Shoot, lads, for Nikë Daka's fallen,
Shoot, you Lekas of the Highlands,
Onwards, heroes, into battle!"
To his feet then flew Halili,
Brandishing his slashing sabre,
Launching at the bridge, he stormed it,
Like a wild beast in the winter.
Gruda followed, tribe that's famous
Far and wide for use of sabres,
Hoti soared whom God's assisted
In the use of arms, gunpowder.
Like a landslide from the heights that
Fast descended, loudly roaring,
Taking with it rocks and boulders,
Knocking down the trees and houses,
Everywhere that tempest hurtles,
Like it, to the Cem descended
All the fighters into battle,
Lads of Gruda, like the zanas,
Lads of Hoti, proud their mothers,
Proud their mothers, though they're weeping.
Now the bridge and ford traversing,
Some were swimming, others wading,
All those fighters, God Almighty,
Like two torrents from the high peaks
When their currents join together,
When they meet in mountain gorges,

Thence to plunge down through the gravel,
Onto broad fields through the flat lands.
There, two armies met; their sabres,
How they clashed in Rrzhanica!
Hutas and *novicas* silent,
White caps and *kapicas* flailing,
Skulls of fighters were sent flying,
Blood, it frothed and earth did tremble.
Oh, dear Stoké, wretched mother,
On that mountain ledge, come, look out,
If your son is in the army,
Come, you poor thing, have a peek here,
For I fear he's met his end now,
Hoodwinked by the *gospodari,*
Met up with Albanian kinsfolk.
See those *shkjas* there supine, fallen,
Is perchance your son among them,
Some Jovan or some Stojani,
Some Nikiq or some Radiqi?
Have a glance, you broken woman,
Though it will be hard to find him.
Fifty lie there without noses,
Lacking skulls are just as many,
Wretched Montenegrin mother!
Why's the river Cem now roaring?
Why that pealing in the mountains?
Why are all the fields rejoicing?
They say Mark Milani's beaten,
Mark Milani, chosen hero,
New to you were mountain Lekas,
For your rubles on the war ground
Could not blunt the blades of sabres,
Not a penny there will help you,
Oh Nikolla, Mark Milani!
Better hustle to Cetinje
If you want to stay alive now.
Wise old men, they have a saying:
"Nimble legs are your salvation."
Mark rushed off as did the army,
Right behind them Highland fighters.
Blithe the first, but sad the last ones
Caught by swift Albanian runners,

Ne'er to get to Montenegro.
Friends, I know not then what followed,
It was daytime, then the night fell,
Put an end to all the fighting.
Fled the *shkjas*, and Rrzhanica
Fell to those brave Highland soldiers,
At the ford they took position,
For the *shkjas* can ne'er be trusted.
Oh good *zana*, I invoke you,
Tell me, were they any different,
Fighters of George Castriota,
When they used to go to battle,
Any different from these men now,
When they swear by God, united?

Canto 15

THE HERALD

A jackdaw, a bad omen, perches on the roof of the palace in Cetinje as the herald arrives to announce that the Montenegrin army has been vanquished and that the Highlanders intend to cross into Montenegro.

On the rooftop in Cetinje,
Rooftop of the prince's palace,
Sits a jackdaw, cackling, cawing,
And they say those birds, my brother,
Augur and portend much evil,
Thus at least 'tis in Albania,
Surely, too, in Montenegro,
For when it began its crowing,
Was the prince on his veranda,
Huffing, puffing had he come out,
"Hue, hue," moaning loudly.
And behold, when he looked up to
Dobërsku, that snow-white mountain,
Did he glimpse a lad advancing
Like the wind towards Cetinje,
Fleeing from some storm behind him.
Who's that lad, a thief or watchman
Running wildly down the highway?
Wondered to himself the prince but
Ventured not to ask the question,
Frightened by the jackdaw's cawing.
In no time arrived the runner,
Strode up like a flash of lightning,
Straight to Cetinje came loping,
Entered there the prince's palace.
Gusting by the guards, he spoke out,
Crying Mark Milani'd sent him.
"Welcome to you, reckless hero,"
Said the Prince of Montenegro,
"What's the news from Mark Milani?
How fares fighting on the war grounds?"

With a sigh replied the herald:
"Well, the matter, *gospodari,*
Is, the foe has won the battle,
For your army's taken flight and
With the army, Mark Milani.
The Albanians grabbed the war grounds,
Several of our heads they cut off,
Several of them fell, were slaughtered,
Of the wounded do not ask me.
To Qemosku Plain they drove us
Over fallow fields and pastures,
Step by step pursued us, running,
'til the night fell, we saw nothing,
Only then did cease the battle.
That alone was not the reason
Why we fled though armed for fighting,
For a worse fate then befell us:
Yes, their battle cry's been sounded.
Hustled's from each house a fighter,
From the Highlands lethal weapons,
From the lowlands steeds and bridles,
All united by their *besa.*
All the Highlands have now risen,
Hutas hoisted, sabres whetted,
Leading them, as we have heard, are
Hodo Begu and the Captain,
Who for sultan, for their country'll
Spare not lives nor their possessions.
Both are noble, both are heroes,
Lightning-like the Captain lunges,
Hodo Begu is like thunder,
To the Seven Kings their fame's spread.
Tuz they've taken like swift eagles.
Just to see them! Oh, Your Highness,
Such an army's there assembled,
That you could not even count them.
Dukagjini's sent two thousand
Soldiers like the Drin when storming
Down its gorges to the valleys
When the mountain snows have melted.
Yes, and unrelenting Shala
Known for warfare and protection.

That Mar Lula is their leader,
Hirsute fighter with black whiskers,
Far and wide prized for his wisdom,
For his wisdom and his boldness
With his bayonet and pistol.
All the five tribes of Mirdita
In Rragami's cliffs in ambush
Lie, three thousand rifles ready,
Renowned for their faith these fighters,
Men of swift hands and light-footed,
Men whose *ora*'s never vanquished.
To the war grounds of the *zanas*
Leads them one of the Gjonmarkajs,
Noble lad on dappled courser,
Like the day-star in Albania,
Prenk Bibë Doda's what they call him.
But, milord, what is to happen?
Shkodra's risen, Muslims, Christians,
Beys the Muslims, merchants Christians,
Dressed in robes and shoes of Captains,
White felt trousers, kilts a-pleated,
With their sabres and *shejshanas,*
With Martini rifles, pistols
Double-barrelled and six-shooters,
With Albanian funds and *besa.*
Truth be told, oh *gospodari,*
I am really frightened of them.
When a noble lad abandons
All his land and wife and children,
He'll be thinking one thought only,
That of dying, not returning.
Even if the men should want to,
They've a lion as their leader
Who would shoot them in the forehead,
Hodo Begu, mountain falcon,
Of an ancient noble family.
But there's more that I must tell you,
Come to Tuz have those wild Highlands,
From each house to Tuz a fighter,
Shooters come from generous Shkreli,
From wise Vukli and sage Nikçi,
Fighters come from rich Kelmendi,

Men who're led on by that chieftain
Dressed in golden robes, Çun Mula,
Him, the best son of Albania.
To them also sent a message
That Toptani, *drangue* hero,
That he'd come with Mat and Kruja
Here to battle for Albania.
Thus to arms arose the Tosks and
Men of Dibra, Luma, Peja,
Gashi, Krasniqi, Gucia,
Both Gjakova and Tetova,
With their men in Tuz assembled,
Bent to sacrifice their lives both
For Albania and the sultan.
Swore an oath, Muslims on Korans,
On the Gospels swore the Christians,
Living, not to yield the Highlands.
Mark Milani fears the battle.
Therefore, he would dare to beg you
To consent and have the kindness
Just this once to halt the warfare.
We've no hope to heist the Highlands,
Other plots and plans we'll hatch out,
From another side harass them.
In the end we're sure to seize it
For we've Moscow as our mother."
Thus proclaimed the herald, sighing.
Prince Nikolla gloomed and glowered.
On his feet he stood there, speechless,
Had you stabbed, you'd see no bleeding,
Stood dumbfounded, knowing matters
Were not well with the Albanians.
For a while he stood there, thinking,
Then sat down to pen a letter,
Set to writing Mark Milani,
Telling him to leave the war grounds:
"Mark Milani, valiant fighter,
I am saddened now at hearing
God's not let us subjugate that
Country of George Castriota,
Montenegro, Hoti, Gruda,
Set upon them our *kapicas*.

Great hopes did I harbour for you,
Now you've gotten into problems.
No use crying. These Albanians
Have for ages been a bother,
Both the Muslims and the Christians,
No one's ever had luck with them.
Yet there is an ancient saying:
One blow will not fell an oak tree,
Cows take time to chew their cud, so
Send back to their homes the *çetas*.
So far, as I see the matter,
If you ask me, it would seem our
Heads against a wall we're bashing.
We'll need time to take Albania,
For it has a lucky *ora*."
With black wax he sealed the letter,
Gave it to a youthful herald,
Who respectfully did kiss it.
Rising like a sabre brandished,
Long life to the prince he wished and
Set off dashing up the mountains,
Back and forth the paths he followed,
Heels and toes were springing nimbly
Over fields and over boulders,
Running in the day and nighttime,
What else could he do? Though long the
Journey, he refused to linger,
Duty always drove him onwards.
When the first cocks started crowing,
O'er Qemosku Plain he hastened,
When the second cocks were crowing,
Mark Milani had espied him
And he handed him the letter.
Mark read over the epistle,
Bowed his head, his whiskers wilting,
And as dawn rose, with his army
He withdrew to Montenegro.

Canto 16

THE KULSHEDRA

Canto 16 constitutes an after-battle interlude with a mythological analogy to the main conflict. In a tempest, a fiery seven-headed *kulshedra* has escaped from a cave in Shala to take revenge on the *drangue*, Vocerr Bala. The *drangues*, personifying the Highland heroes, have gathered to confront and defeat the monster. After winning the day, the *drangues* are invited to a feast of grain, bread, deer milk, honey and meat by the *oras* of Shala who observed the fighting from a nearby cliff. After the meal, the *oras* take up the dance and sing the song of the maiden Eufrozina of Janina who chooses death over giving herself to the tyrant Ali Pasha Tepelena.

Oh, have mercy, God Almighty!
What a storm's been leashed upon us,
All that weather, all the lightning,
All the roar of rumbling thunder,
Has the sky been cleft asunder?
Streams and torrents overflowing,
Rainstorms beating, tempests blowing,
Awesome echoes in the mountains.
Such a tumult in the Highlands,
I don't know how we'll survive it!
On Shala Ridge was a *kulshedra,*
Seven heads and claws, six pairs, with
But one eye upon each forehead,
Tail to Shala's river stretching,
Twisting, in convulsions writhing.
There the monster neighed and snorted,
Spewing fire and belching brimstone,
Causing boulders, cliffs to crumble,
Bent on crushing Dukagjini
For an outrage caused by Shala:
When the *drangue,* Vocerr Bala,
But a child, had come across her
Sleeping in a mountain cavern,
Did he seize a stake and ram it
Through an eye upon her forehead.
Shala Ridge was all in flames from

Riverbed to lofty pine trees.
Such a deed had stunned the people,
As the boulders cracked like chestnuts,
In their homes and barns they cowered.
Wild beasts fled down to the valleys,
Wolves howled in the forests up in
Gur i Lekës and Parûni,
Even rocks and trees took pity.
When the *drangues* of Albania,
In the Highlands and the lowlands,
Saw and heard the lightning flashing,
Heard the roaring of the thunder
Echoing o'er Dukagjini
From the Drin to Qafa e Diellit,
Well they understood that somewhere
Up there'd come out a *kulshedra*,
Planning to destroy some mountain.
All of them, the Muslims, Christians,
From the peaks and from the valleys,
Rose and soared into the air while
Bringing red-black banners with them,
Taking axes, hoisting hatchets,
Hefting harpoons long and pincers,
With them chains and steel-clad handles,
Anchors made for ships from Venice.
Through the clouds and through the tempests
Off to Shala Ridge they hastened,
There to counter the *kulshedra*
Which was now the bane of Shala,
Bane known to the world 'til lately.
From Mirdita came Llesh Gjoni
Of Gjonmarkaj, *zana* hero,
Shining star among the captains.
No one has been born his equal
With a rifle or in beauty
Where the sun shines in our country.
Next to him Bibë Llesh Markola,
Swarthy eagle 'mongst the falcons,
Even if you chopped his head off,
Least a week he'd keep on living.
Ndrekë Heqimi came from Shkodra,
Never heartier a hero.

He in twain could snap a *medjid,*
In his tribe was always wisdom,
That is why the sultan chose him,
As his bodyguard he made him.
With him came those hirsute fighters,
Proven heroes, giant soldiers,
One Gjokë Kukli, Çapaliku,
Beqo Qoshja, Hamz Sadiku,
Men as strong as steel, those warriors,
Fearing neither sword nor danger.
Then two men, two bolts of thunder,
Came down from the heights of Peja,
Rrustem Uka, handsome youth he,
Xhem Sadrija, mountain black bear,
Born and bred he in Rugova,
Stronger no lads in Kosova,
In Kosova or Gjakova,
'cept Gjakova's Ton Golija,
Charging forwards like the storm winds,
Charging on that dappled courser.
Straight he rushed at the *kulshedra,*
Gnashing with his teeth, you'd think him.
Gjeto Gega came from Shllaku,
Ruddy cheeks like pomegranates,
Branch-like whiskers downward winding.
When he said his piece, this hero
To his word like rock was steadfast.
Then from Palç arose Prêlë Tuli,
From Kthella Marka Kuli,
From Traboina Llesh Nkollë Luli,
Rose Dodë Preçi from Kastrati,
Gjeto Marku sabre brandished,
Like the flashing of gunpowder
When it's set off by a flintlock.
He's the pride of all of Hoti.
Marash Vata came from Shkreli,
Like a storm cloud filled with showers
Pelting down on Dukagjini,
And Gjin Petri from Kurbini,
Both renowned throughout the country
For their weapons and their wisdom.
These men met at Qafa e Boshit,

With the *drangues* of Shala and Shoshi:
With Mar Lula, noble hero,
Gjelosh Kola, skilled at speaking,
Mehmet Shpendi, rifle-bearer,
Let Putani and Tol Cani,
Who'd already been in battle,
Set to fighting the *kulshedra,*
Shooting at her from a distance,
For they were yet few in number.
At the pass the *drangues* gathered,
Came there to discuss the matter,
How and where to strike, attack her.
Then into the air they surged up,
Soaring, winging like a *çeta,*
Like a storm emitting lightning
To the din and roar of thunder.
Onwards shouting, onwards screaming,
Thus they pounced on the *kulshedra,*
Hurling harpoons from a distance,
Wounding her now with their axes,
Gouging holes with all their pincers,
On her back one pelted anchors,
One lunged at her head with sabre,
All attacked her now together,
Flinging at her cliffs and boulders.
Like the mountain springs her blood flowed.
In the din the Ridge was shaken,
Woe to all of wretched Shala.
How she twisted, the *kulshedra,*
Wriggling, writhing in convulsions,
To one side she rolled her body,
Then one hundred paces rising
In the air, she lunged with fury,
Then withdrew into her cavern,
And the *drangues* launched their lances,
From her maw spewed flames and fire,
Sticky drooled the spit, saliva,
You'd have fled a day's march from her
At the stench her mouth emitted.
When she mauled that mountain peak, like
Grains of sand the boulders crumbled,
O'er Bishkaz Pass cliffs were sparking.

In her anger and her fury
Did she writhe and stretch her body,
Drew her tail out, upwards swishing,
Round the Ridge the winds were rushing,
Tried to frighten off the *drangues*,
But a *drangue* can't be frightened.
See Llesh Gjoni storming at her,
Twenty paces long his pincers,
As the rain beat and the windstorm,
With the thunder and the lightning,
Through the jagged bolts a-flashing,
He assaulted the *kulshedra*,
Tried to catch her jaw wide open,
Open to eat Mehmet Shpendi
Who had thrown a boulder at her
And one of her ribs had shattered.
Seeing his attack, the monster
Panicked and did crawl retreating,
Slithered back into her cavern,
In its depths was she convulsing,
Only were her heads protruding,
Like inside its shell a tortoise,
Spewing fire and belching brimstone,
All the time was Llesh approaching.
Not a second did he linger,
Hastily did Llesh leap at her,
With his arms the pincers opened,
Seized her jaw between the pincers,
Squeezed with all his might the pincers,
Like a vise when pressed together.
Back and forth he shook the monster,
Bashed the beast against the boulders,
Pulling, pushing, he persisted,
Twisting wildly in his effort,
Trying best to daze and stun her,
Wrench the beast out of her cavern.
How she struggled, the *kulshedra,*
How she lunged, her claws outstretching,
From her seven throats she bellowed,
Shrieks heard down to the Shpërdhaza.
Hunched and rigid was her body,
Then upon the earth it thudded,

Dazed and struggling did she lie there,
Splayed among the rocks and hillsides,
With her legs she pressed the pincers,
With her teeth she tried to bite them,
But she could not get them open,
For the smithy was a master,
For good Llesh, he held them firmly,
Woe to anyone Llesh grappled!
Like a hook was Llesh bent over,
Pegged one leg against the cliff side,
Sweat in streams flowed down his forehead.
Llesh then clenched his teeth and molars,
Pulled and yanked at the *kulshedra*,
But the beast fought back against him,
Back and forth the two were tugging,
Shoving, heaving one another,
He to drag her from the cavern,
She to cower in its confines
And escape from such a torment.
Bending now did Llesh assemble
All the strength and might within him,
Bent and seized upon the pincers
Using hands and strength of shoulders,
Made of steel those bulging biceps,
Tense in him the might of arms and
Braced the sinew in his muscles,
From his mouth the foam was spewing,
Foam and blood, by God, together,
Gave him strength and, in his fury,
Gone berserk did he now drag her,
Under foot the cliffs did crumble.
In his mouth two teeth he shattered,
One pace did he pull the monster
From the cave in which she cowered,
But gave way, a step retreating,
'til again his body rallied,
And two solid paces added,
Yanking the *kulshedra* outwards.
Five or six times this repeating
He extracted half the monster.
Then, loudly as he could muster,
Cried the captain to his comrades,

Beach trees from the ridges echoed.
Spitting blood, shook the *kulshedra*,
Blood enough to work a millstone:
"At her, comrades! Hey, where are you?
The *kulshedra*'s been extracted,
Where are you, good Rrustem Uka?
Curse you, may your food be poisoned!
Nowhere can I see you near me.
Forwards, bastards, let's attack her,
Crush her skulls if you are able
For she'll tear me into pieces
If, by God, she flees the pincers."
Swiftly soared the *drangues* up, like
Arrows shot at the *kulshedra*,
One now from the front was raging,
One attacking from above her,
Up and down and round about her,
Just as far as each was able.
Rrustem Uka, valiant hero,
Through the thunder, lightning flashing,
Rushes at her panting jaws and,
Seizing with his hands the sabre,
Strikes to chop one of her heads off.
With it did he gouge an eye out,
Though her skull he could not sever.
Ton Golija rode on horseback
Forwards, roaring like a windstorm,
With his hundred-oka cudgel,
Seized it, hurled it at her head which,
Smashed to pulp, upon the ground splashed.
Now assaulting, Let Putani
At her heaves a monstrous boulder,
Twenty men could not have moved it,
Heaved it, much as he was able,
In his rage at the *kulshedra*.
On her back he hurled the boulder,
Made the beast roar out in fury,
How she tore and raved in frenzy!
Rose and stamped and then did coil up.
Hook-like, bent her neck protruding,
As she sought to lunge at Llesh, and
Yet, she could not move at all since

Llesh had pinned her down his prisoner.
Xhem Sadrija, lightning hero,
Called to Gjeto Gega, swearing:
"By the Lord who did create you,
Gjeto, come to my assistance,
Take your lance and make use of it,
Down one of her throats now thrust it,
I'm here ready with my hatchet,
Poised upon her back to strike her,
Chop her head off, if I'm able,
On the ground her brains to scatter."
Gjeto Gega moved forth quickly,
Seized the lance thick as a cart shaft,
Poised it at her wind pipe, thrusting,
Shoved it three spans deep inside her.
One last time did the *kulshedra*
Try to rise and, backwards moving,
Slide into the rocks more deeply,
But since Llesh was yanking at her
Like a madman with the pincers,
On her breast she fell, collapsing
With her neck stretched out before her
(For her jaws were firmly captured).
And indeed, her neck was broken,
All the jaw had burst and shattered,
Torn to shreds, her throat was hanging
Limp like tripe between the pincers,
What, now that her jaws were broken,
Happened after Llesh attacked her?
Forwards did he pull her, sliding,
Back at least a hundred paces,
'til he reached a high embankment.
Though, still caught, did the *kulshedra*
Strive against the rocks and, clawing,
Push her body further backwards,
Deeper back into the cavern.
"At her, men! Do not release her!"
Once more screamed aloud Llesh Gjoni,
Turned and rushed at her, assaulting,
Two yards every step did measure.
Holding in his hands the pincers,
Did he bound across her body,

Seized one of her heads and swiftly
Sliced the neck off from her torso.
How the *drangues* now stormed at her,
How the din and uproar echoed!
All mankind was struck with horror
As with axes and with hatchets,
As with boulders and with anchors,
And with pincers and with lances,
And with harpoons and with tridents,
Both the Muslims and the Christians
Set upon her, the *kulshedra*,
Shooting at her and attacking,
Some above her soared and harried,
Others from the side assaulted,
All together they harassed her
With their long harpoons and hatchets.
Winds were blowing, storms were raging,
Bolts of lightning, wildly flashing,
Followed by a roar of thunder
Echoed in the hills resounding.
Smoke and fog rose in the mountains,
In them Shala Ridge was reeling.
In her cave did the *kulshedra*
Cower, bathed in blood, and heavy
Writhe, retracting thus her belly,
Backwards on all fours did flail and
Boulders hurtled down the chasm
Like a landslide when it thunders,
Taking with it stones and gravel,
Hurtled, plunged into the waters.
On the Ridge a cascade echoed
Roaring, as her body slithered,
And the earth quaked down to Raja.
Xhem Sadrija, filled with fury,
Couldn't reach her with his thrust-hoe,
With her jaws ripped by the pincers,
So he stormed into the cavern,
Down into the depths behind her,
But, alas, made no encounter,
For an abyss was her cavern,
In it vanished the *kulshedra*.
Swiftly did the *drangues* gather,

There amassing, formed a *çeta.*
All those handsome youths together
From that mountain wrenched a boulder,
Rolled it right before the cavern,
Like a wedge to block the entrance,
So that ne'er more the *kulshedra*
Should with feet and claws attempt to
Raze or ravage Dukagjini;
Only then they paused for respite
As the storm clouds fled, retreating,
And the moon shone in the heavens.
Shala's *ora,* may she flourish,
On a mountain brow was sitting,
Somewhere up there, over Nicaj.
She had seen the *drangues'* struggle,
Seen their fight with the *kulshedra*
On that Ridge, on rocky crags, and
Was delighted, filled with pleasure
When she beheld what had happened,
How the *drangues* of Albania
Beat and vanquished the *kulshedra,*
For they chopped three of her heads off,
Bored a hole right through her throat and
Ripped up, tore apart her body,
Blocked and sealed her in a cavern,
Placed a boulder at the entrance
So that she could never ever
Raze or ravage Dukagjini.
When she saw those earthly heroes
Resting, seated there before her,
Heard them speak to one another,
Telling of their feats of daring,
Boasting of the deeds of that night,
Did she scream out three times over,
On Morina Pass it echoed.
Dukagjini's *oras* heard her
In the caverns where they cowered
Hiding in that night of horror.
And the *oras* set out soaring,
All aglow with lights a-twinkling,
Off to meet with Shala's *ora,*
Dukagjini's elder sister.

Thus the *ora* did address them:
"Have you heard or not the news that,
Yes, the *drangues* of Albania,
May the Lord give long life to them!
Crushed this evening the *kulshedra*,
Fighting on the Ridge of Gimaj;
Sealed the monster in the cavern
With a boulder from the mountain
Whence she'll never move while living.
But, what now? I am in sorrow,
For they have not had their dinner.
It was evening when they set out,
And their spouses were not with them,
There to cook and serve their dinner,
And to set for them the table,
Standing ready with the water.
Therefore, sisters, let us hurry,
Let us make the *drangues* dinner,
Let us swiftly reap the harvest,
Let us thresh the grain and mill it,
Let us knead it well and bake it,
Milk the deer upon the pastures,
Gather honey from the tree holes.
Two choice stags we'll hunt and capture,
Roast them slowly o'er a spit fire."
Shala's *ora* thus addressed them.
All of Dukagjini's *oras*
Twinkled, in a flash they vanished,
Just the time for one sole ring dance,
Just as quickly they were back there,
One with bread piled on her head and
One, milk in a bucket tendered,
Made of linden bark the bucket,
Honeycomb another offered.
'cross their shoulders others carried
Spits from which hung two choice stags as
Shala's *ora* had requested,
To be roasted on a spit fire.
Now that they were all together
Did they set off, winging, soaring,
Dressed in white, with hair down spilling,
On the Ridge's peak they landed,

Where the *drangues* were discussing.
Shala's *ora* now approached them
And in sweet tones she addressed them:
"Nice to see you, earthly heroes."
"Welcome to you, Earthly Beauty,
Welcome to you, where've you come from?
Where've you brought these noble maids from?"
Llesh the Captain posed the question.
"Long life, truthfully, I wish you,
I myself am Shala's *ora*,
Sister of Mirdita's *ora*,
Who, like dawn's light, spends her summers
On Munella's mountain pastures.
These are Dukagjini's *oras*,
We've come to these alpine meadows
Here to see you and to meet you,
For we know your reputation.
Fame this night you left behind you,
When you vanquished the *kulshedra*
Out to ravage Dukagjini,
But I see that you're exhausted
For you haven't eaten dinner,
And here in these lofty mountains
Where there're only rocks and boulders,
There's no food for you to dine on
For your spouses are not with you
Who could make and serve your dinner.
So, we *oras* of the mountains
Have prepared a dinner for you,
And have brought the repast with us.
Have a seat and let us serve you."
So the heroes took their places,
One by one in proper order.
At the table head Llesh Gjoni
Of Gjonmarkaj, made their leader,
Oldest line in all Albania.
Then the *oras* served the dinner,
Placed the roast of meat before them,
Brought the milk forth in the buckets,
Mixed with snow, 'twould freeze your teeth off.
To their fill they fetched the honey,
Best meal made in beechwood forests,

Spring of water flowing by them,
Icy, pure as gold, the water.
At their leisure they imbibed it.
When the heroes finished eating,
To one side they rose retiring,
Sitting over there, conversing
With the fair *ora* of Shala,
Waxed on customs, ways and wisdom,
Faith and rules for giving welcome,
Spoke at length of ancient battles,
Of George Castriota's courage,
Of the *drangues* and *kulshedra*,
Of *breshanas*, five-round cannons,
And they came to speak of freedom,
Spoke of freedom and Albania,
How to wrest its independence,
Bowing not to king or sultan,
That it have no foreign ruler
Just as God Himself ordained it.
Later spoke up Shala's *ora*,
Turned and uttered to her comrades:
"Maidens, let us do a ring dance,
Let there be some singing with it,
For the sun has not yet risen,
And the *drangues* love to listen."
Dukagjini's *oras* rose up,
Clothed and veiled in snow-white garments,
Hand in hand they set off dancing,
Rolled their sleeves up to their shoulders,
Long hair flowing down their bodies.
On their heads were flowered garlands,
On their legs they trod so softly.
Face to face in two rows moving,
Did they sing to one another,
Started dancing full of longing:
There are very many maidens
But like that maid from Janina,
Nowhere will you find her equal
Where the sun shines and the rain falls.
Eyes like sun, the moon her forehead,
Slender figure like the cypress,
Her mother called her Eufrozina,

Lucky omen for Albania.
Ali Pasha glimpsed her as she
Dove-like stepped upon the terrace
And the maiden pleased him greatly,
Off he sent the Moor to fetch her.
At her door the Moor commanded:
"Come down swiftly hither, maiden,
Come along now, for the pasha
Has requested you to visit."
"May your mouth be parched for speaking!"
Gave the maiden as her answer,
"I am but a simple maiden,
Don't know how to speak to pashas,
Not to mention Ali Pasha,
He might come and chop my head off
As he's chopped off many others,
I'll not renounce faith and honour."
Rage and anger filled the pasha,
Once again the Moor he summoned:
"Swarthy Moor, you listen to me,
Two times never speaks a pasha,
Either have that maid tonight here
Or with frogs I'll have you sleeping
At the bottom of the lake, you
Dog you, do you understand me?"
That night he went to the maiden,
Seized her, brought her to the lakeside,
Where a wooden raft was waiting,
There to bear her o'er the water.
After rowing to the middle
Of the lake, the Moor addressed her,
All the while the raft was floating,
Spoke now to the maiden, saying:
"There's no way out for you, maiden,
I'm no man to mince my words, so
Either go now to the pasha,
Or I'll drown you in the water."
To him spoke the maiden smiling,
"Yes, I'll go now to the pasha,
But I need my bridal garments
For I've made no preparations,"
To the Moor she thus responded,

To that dog, son of a dog, and
Rising, plunged into the water,
Sank and vanished to the bottom.
Word then spread across the country
That Albania has such maidens
Who, defending faith and honour,
Sacrifice their young existence.
Face to face did sing the *oras*,
Though now, as their song concluded,
On the mountain peaks began to
Shine the early rays of dawn and,
Then, the *oras* and the *drangues*,
Hosts of beings altogether
Vaulted to the heavens, vanished,
Gone at once, like bolts of lightning,
Off to where they all had come from.

Canto 17

AT THE GRAPEVINE PASS

After the battle of Canto 16, the *oras* and *drangues* have returned home. Only two *drangues* remain, Rrustem Uka and Xhem Sadrija, who are to prepare the ceremonies for a wedding. They fly up to the Grapevine Pass (Qafë Hardhí). Here they take their rest, smoking and cleaning their weapons. In the moonlight they sense someone approaching. Mark Milani has returned with eight new battalions, determined to conquer Plava and Gucia. The two Albanian *drangues* are hard-pressed to defend the pass against three hundred Montenegrin troops, but with the help of the shepherds of the vicinity they win the day. Mark Milani decides to withdraw his troops for a fresh battle at Sutjeska. The *zanas*, who have been observing the battle from a nearby hill again, now take up residence on a high mountain cliff overlooking Sutjeska, and wait.

Apples, cornels bloomed and blossomed,
Where is Rrustem Uka, mother?
He is up at Grapevine Pass where
Chirps the *zana* while *shejshanas*
Shoot at night amidst the moonbeams.
There, before the dawn had risen
Broke out wild and savage fighting:
Guns and rifles echoed firing,
Cannons thundered o'er the lowlands
Making fields and marshes shudder.
Mountain beech groves groaned, lamented,
Haramia echoed loudly.
Rrustem Uka, Xhem Sadrija,
Two young lads come from Rogova,
Did their best to fire their rifles
At those Montenegrin *çetas*
Who had set upon Gucia
In the dark of night, unwitnessed,
As the prince had given order.
Mischief-maker Prince Nikolla,
None among the Slavs his equal,
Mustered up a mighty army,
Eight battalions full in number,
All were Montenegrin fighters,

Copper-toned some, others ruddy,
Some had whiskers to their waistlines,
Ear to ear, yes, to their breeches,
All of them were dauntless heroes.
When in battle, did these bastards
Never shrink from swords or rifles,
Never shrink from cannons, mortars,
Had no fear of fire or water,
Mark Milani was their leader.
And the prince told Mark to guide his
Army on a moonless night and
March on Plava and Gucia,
Being seen or heard by no one.
Mark was quite a clever fellow,
One who'd split a hair in two, and
So before the army left, he
Sent a *çeta* towards Gucia
Made up of three hundred fighters,
Lads who placed on life no value,
Birth and death were equal to them,
Sent to see if foes were waiting
There in ambush, causing danger
To the silent army moving
On to Gucia and Plava.
Xhem Sadrija waited for them,
Xhem Sadrija, eyes like storm winds,
And that hero, Rrustem Uka,
Stern his word and his appearance,
Both these men were born as *drangues*,
None in silence could get by them,
Even if the sultan tried to,
They would rise and loudly clamour,
They were itching both for battle.
Who sent those lads from Rogova
Up to Grapevine Pass exchanging
Rifle fire with Montenegro
Through the lands that are Gucia?
Yes, it was Albania's *ora*!
She herself had ordered that at
Sunrise on the Grapevine Pass both
Xhem and Rrustem there be standing
Ready with Martini rifles,

Set to foil the prince's scheming
Who since early days had sought to
Carve a chunk out of Albania.
Yes, on Shala Ridge at sunrise
Did the *oras* and the *drangues*
Take to flight and, upwards soaring,
Vanish swiftly, in a flurry,
Some a twinkling left behind them,
Others sparks left in the heavens.
All returned to where they'd come from,
All returned where'er they wanted.
To the shades and glades the *oras*,
'mongst the rocks and springs of water.
To their homes went back the *drangues*
In the Highlands and the lowlands,
Only Rrustem, Xhem Sadrija
Did not wake up in their houses,
To the Grapevine Pass they'd flown up.
Rrustem, son of Ukë Kabashi,
Somewhere there beyond Budashi,
Found a maiden for his brother,
Highland maiden like a *zana*,
Like the *zana* of Haramia
Who brings fortune to our country.
And with Xhem he had agreed to
Travel that day to Budashi,
There to meet the maiden's father,
With him fix the day and hour
When he'd fetch the bride and wed her,
How much cloth he'd give the maiden,
And which wedding customs'd follow.
When the *oras* and the *drangues*
Thus did part from one another.
Rrustem, Xhem, like two sparks flying,
To the Grapevine Pass did hasten,
On the road to Montenegro,
Thence to reach Gucia, Plava,
Which the prince did fondly covet.
There the heroes took position
On the road among the fir trees,
Hid like falcons midst the boulders,
Waiting for the sun to come up,

For a guest is most unwelcome
If he shows up at the wrong time,
Save when chased by foes or rainstorm.
May misfortune never find you
Home with nought your guests to offer,
No misfortune could be greater.
Thus the two took up position,
Each a cigarette did roll, for
With them they had flintstone lighters.
Then the two began discussing
How to make their presentation,
How they could persuade their host to
Hand the maid out in the autumn,
When the goats and rams are fattened
And the ripe grapes fill the vineyards.
Thus the two lads sat discussing,
O'er his knee kept Xhem his *huta*,
With the rifle cocked and ready,
With a rag and grease he oiled it.
Then he turned to Rrustem, saying:
"Rrusto, ne'er by God you'll find a
Rifle like the sultan *huta*
Here on this side of the ocean,
Nowhere will you find its equal.
Swift as lightning, can this rifle
Cut you down at one day's distance."
"If the rifle's used with courage,"
Answered Rrustem with derision,
"None like my Martini rifle,
No arm like it on the planet."
Then he turned and added, teasing:
"Tell me now, if it should happen
That you found yourself in battle
With the prince's troops or sultan's,
Are you sure you'd not surrender
Without firing, and be captured,
Sure you'd not be taken prisoner?"
"I don't know, to tell you truly,"
Gave the young lad for an answer,
"For this rifle can be moody,
Sometimes it won't even fire
On a crow out in the courtyard,

Not to mention troops of soldiers.
But my heart would rather have me
Die a hundred times before I'd
Ever put to shame Albania."
Then, while Sadri's son was speaking
Did they hear a noise or scuffling
On Gucia road below them,
Something like a *çeta* passing,
None were coughing, none were talking,
You would think that they were bandits
Lurking for some evildoing,
Out to steal and murder in the
Dark of night, no one to see them,
As among such thieves it's custom.
"Look out!" murmured Xhem Sadrija,
Holding in his hand the *huta*,
Not reflecting on his actions,
Did he aim the gun and fire it.
Cliff to cliff the mountain pastures
Echoed as with cannons, mortars,
Someone shouted "*kuku meni*"
Down along the road below them.
"God, the *shkjas*!" said Rrustem Uka
Through his teeth, unbowed and waiting
With his bayoneted rifle.
Twice he shot, like lightning flashing,
Through the beeches, pines and fir trees,
Scattered did the soldiers, fleeing
In amongst the cliffs, decided
To preserve themselves or perish,
Not to yield though without combat.
Have you ever seen, oh brother,
How a school of tench will scatter
In the depths and in the shallows,
Hiding midst the rocks and gravel
When a person takes a stone
And throws it, casts it in the water?
Thus took flight the Montenegrins
Through the beeches and the fir trees,
When the two shots echoed, flashing
From those two Albanian *hutas*.
In an instant did they scatter,

Some fled down the road escaping,
Others over the embankment,
Some among the trees took refuge,
Hiding heads and hiding bodies,
Took no heed of their *kapicas*
Which were rolling down the hillside.
There are caps galore at market,
Should you lose your head, however,
You'll not find the road to get there.
Thus the *shkjas* became aware
That they had stumbled on an ambush,
Thus they all took up position,
Loudly firing their *novicas*,
All at once three hundred rifles,
Belched to stir bile in your bloodstream.
Xhem and Rrustem were expecting
The attack and they responded,
Launching lightning from their rifles,
Each shot fired did hit its target.
Rrustem's *huta*, nighttime killer,
And Xhem's *huta*, skin and flesh pierced
Every time the lad employed it.
Both of them were *drangues,* used to
Hunting, lunging at *kulshedras*.
One side fired and then the other,
Both sides shouted, screaming madly.
Ranted, railed at one another
Cried and struggled at the foe, and
Cursed their fathers and their mothers,
As the ways of war would have it;
Full of flames the Grapevine Pass and
Scarlet-red Gucia's towers.
Wild boars fled up to the springs and
Deer took refuge midst the boulders,
Eagles to the clouds did soar and
Crows did cower under snow banks.
Many mothers have been wailing
Since that battle there exploded,
Since the *hutas* and *novicas*
Fired there and resounded loudly,
Woeful, moaned the wounded fighters.
Leaves and branches fell to earth as

Many bullets whizzed among them,
And the grass began to wither,
Smothered densely in the smoke and
Yellow flames of black gunpowder.
Who knows what is next to happen?
Though they're youthful *drangue* heroes,
Two lads cannot beat an army.
As to what is going to happen,
Rrustem doesn't seem concerned for
Look at how that manly hero's
Raised his head behind the boulders,
Look, he's roaring like a lion,
Calling to the Montenegrins:
"Slow your pace, oh Montenegrins,
This, our land's a vicious country.
God has helped me in my struggle
For I'm not here doing battle
Just to bother other people
Or to steal the goods of strangers,
But for honour and for freedom
For our homeland, fair Albania,
Which would rather be destroyed than
Fall into the prince's clutches."
When the Montenegrin leader
Down the hillside heard the challenge,
Heard the taunts of the Albanian,
Did his face turn red in fury,
How he gnashed his teeth and molars,
And he roared out loud, commanding:
"Seize your arms, oh lads!" he blasted,
"For it's always been our custom
Face to face to fight the foe and
Never like a mole be buried."
To his feet then sprang the hero,
Gun in hand, in teeth his sabre,
Set off for the rugged forest
With his five-score nimble soldiers,
With his hundred Montenegrins,
Sometimes sprinting, sometimes climbing,
Through the firs and through the pine trees.
Nearing fast, that Slavic scion
Started shooting with his rifle,

Swift approaching in a fury,
Close to those lads from Rogova,
Striving now to take them prisoner.
For at sunrise had the bandit
Set out on his way, believing
That no army he'd encounter
And no *çeta*, just some people
Out for pleasure, target practice,
On their own, without permission,
Hitting tree trunks in the valley.
But the *drangues* had their *ora*
To impede their being captured,
Not to let the men be taken,
Not to let them be surrounded.
Look now, see how Rrustem Uka,
When the Slavic *çeta* neared him,
To his feet jumped ever-ready,
Leaped as if he were a lion,
Rushed and hid behind a boulder,
Cliff five hundred paces from him.
Cloistered in among the rocks, he
Lost no time to fire his rifle,
As if twenty men were shooting,
Hit the *shkjas* hard in their flank and
Stopped them in their tracks advancing.
Once again the rifle cracked, and
Once again were bullets flying
Through the woods in all directions,
As they once had flown in Shumla.
Thus the rifles clashed and volleyed,
Cries and shots together echoed.
Turning up, did groups of shepherds
Wonder on those mountain pastures
Up above the beechwood forest:
"What's that firing in the valley?"
"Sound the battle cry, for by the
Shkjas have we now been invaded,"
Like a raging steer roared Rrustem,
Raging when a young bull meets it.
"Don't give up, lad, we are coming!"
Rang his voice now through the pinewoods.
As when after heavy rainfall

In the autumn from the arid
Crumbling crests of rugged mountains
Rocks are loosened, start to tumble
Down the steepest slopes and hurtle,
Crushing, strewing topsoil with them
'til they reach the lower ledges,
Thus the shepherds hastened towards the
Grapevine Pass, midst din and clamour,
Where for many tragic mothers
There that day the springtime withered.
Guns in hand and caps on breast with
Belts around their waists tied tightly,
From their *hutas* flames were flaring
As they kept on loading, firing.
Locked in battle, *shkja,* Albanian,
Twined in battle, there entangled,
Striving to slay one another.
O'er their heads such smoke was rising
Fog-like, that the sun did vanish.
First, Albanians *shkjas* repulsed and
Then the *shkjas* took the offensive,
More withdrawal, more offensive,
Back and forth they pushed each other,
Like the waves that pound the coastline.
Thus the heroes fumed in fury,
Tried to wipe out one another,
Some were killed and others wounded,
Some were dying, others writhing.
It would break your heart to see them,
See those men, so young, in battle.
Yet whenever battles rage do
The Albanians show no pity,
Least of all that mountain falcon,
Zhukë Isufi, youthful hero.
When he stormed the *shkjas,* assaulting
Like a steer among the rushes,
Stung by gadflies in the marshes.
So much din and clamour echoed
In the lofty beechwood forests
As he set upon the *shkjas* there.
When Man Sela starts attacking
With two pistols and two daggers,

(etched in his Martini rifle
'long the cock is silver writing),
Do the *shkjas* go into hiding,
Much like rabbits in the thickets
When a ruthless eagle hunts them
With its bloody claws all sharpened,
And those fighters cringe with reason,
For the moment Man espied them,
Saw them, his Martini rifle
Felled them on the spot and chilled them,
As it chilled Risto Stojani,
Nesho Ilia, Gjokë Stjepani,
Also stilled poor Savo Stani.
Not to mention one Nel Bishe,
Bitter lad like bottled poison,
Waiting with his dervish *huta*,
Many *shkjas* he felled and slaughtered,
Lifeless on the ground he left them,
Meat to feed the beasts and vultures.
Woe, alas, you Slavic mothers,
How reversed are now the seasons,
Time for you to don black garments
Since that dark-haired Rrahman Duli
At the Grapevine Pass appeared, he,
Lad born of Martini rifle.
He can end your life abruptly
Waving but his index finger.
He can split your heart and leave you
Like a tree trunk in the gravel
With no son and with no husband,
No worse fate could e'er befall you.
Not much life's left over to you
When you see your menfolk slaughtered.
But, indeed, the truth to tell you,
I'm divided in my pity
When I see their menfolk wiped out,
Down the slopes, on hilltops others,
But my heart is torn asunder
When, alas, I heed what's happened,
See the *shkjas* have come and slaughtered,
See they've slain that Tahir Gjeli
Isuf Pula, Kot Kaçeli,

Better lads you'll never find from
Qafa e Diellit to Postriba,
Lads for booty, cattle-rustling,
For attacking, fortress-taking,
Chopping foes' heads off in battle.
Also dead are Is Abazi,
Lik Sokoli, Rem Kazazi,
And two lads from Gegëhyseni,
And the son of Ragip Ceni,
And a young lad from Isniqi,
Thin as an Italian rifle.
Sprouted were that lad's first whiskers,
Sad the duty to avenge him.
How could it have happened that
Our Isuf Pula there has fallen
Since Isuf was, God's my witness!
Like a touch-hole on a rifle?
Flames and powder could not scare him,
Agile was that lad and clever,
I'm quite sure that he'd have charged right
Through the midst of a battalion.
No, that lad would not have fallen,
Well-protected by his rifle.
Yet, when peril aims to stalk you,
It will do so, good companion,
Either through a foe or brother,
Even if you're safe in hiding.
Isuf charged the Montenegrins
Through the dark cliffs and the oak trees,
On the *shkjas* he wreaked destruction,
Some were slain and others bloodied,
As if some *kulshedra*'d mauled them.
Then appeared amidst the shadows
On the prowl Drekalov Mije,
O'er his brow was a *kapica*.
He had readied his *novica*,
Was about to shoot and fire it,
When Isuf did, like a bruin,
Rise and set aflame his *huta*,
Just like thunder did it echo,
But, alas, the *huta* shattered
In his hands and broke to pieces,

That *shkja* had a lucky *ora*,
Of a vampire was the son, so
Not a cannonball could touch him,
Only could a sabre slaughter
Him since he was born a bastard.
Then the *shkja* aimed his *novica*,
Fired and shot him in the navel,
Wound from which there's no salvation
For the rifle's bullet entered.
Isuf Pula, wretched fellow,
Like a bison to the earth swooned,
On the rocky ledge he lay there,
Neither "ah" nor "oh" lamenting.
One last word the hero whispered
As his soul the body banished:
"Farewell homeland!" then he perished,
Left a pool of blood behind him.
Don't give up now, Rrustem Uka,
If you're, as you seem, a hero,
Leave not unavenged your comrades,
For indeed they've well resisted,
Have not shamed their tribe and people,
Died while fighting for Albania.
To his feet arose then Rrustem,
To his feet sprang up and uttered,
Howling like a beast in snowdrifts:
"Onward, men, assault, attack them!"
Then the *shkjas,* unnerved, retreated,
Started turning tail, withdrawing,
Step by step they treaded, pacing,
Then at last they took to running
At an angle down the hillside,
Over rocks and over thornbush,
Fleeing those Albanian fighters,
Just like deer from hounds escaping.
At their heels were the Albanians
Bounding, making din and clamour,
All along the road they chased them
'til behind the hill they vanished,
None of them seen any longer
'cept the ones who fell and perished.
Haramia's *zana* saw the

Shkjas at Grapevine Pass defeated,
And the Good One jubilated,
Soared from cliff to cliff a-winging,
Struck a tune up, started singing:
"Glory to you, oh Albania,
For you've nowhere any equals
Where the sun shines on the planet,
When it comes to faith and courage.
Poor Albanians, barefoot, ragged,
On the hard, bare soil they sleep with
Only stale bread for their dinner,
Know no skill or handwork, living
Like the beasts out in the bushes.
Tread you, though, upon their honour,
Should you touch upon their homeland,
Or the faith they did inherit,
Then you'll see the rage within them,
See their hearts in anger burning,
As a living sword, they'll shriek and
Thrust themselves into their foe's back,
Like the goshawk 'mongst the chickens.
Mighty hero's Prince Nikolla,
Mighty hero, clever fellow,
But with all his arms and fury,
Had he even boar tusks on him,
He could never take Albania
As he'd planned to in Cetinje.
Do not rush or hurry, *zana,*
When you take up song and dance, for
Endless worries has Albania,
And the war is not yet over,
Yes, indeed, it's only started,
And, alas, I greatly fear that
Blood this very day will spill, since
Shkjas will not give up that simply,
Effort's needed to defeat them.
Can't you with your eyes discern how
Mount Vizitor now is teeming
With the men of Montenegro,
Marching forwards in a fury,
Line on line in countless *çetas*,
To Sutjeska Bridge, the war grounds,

Where gave orders Mark Milani
That the army be assembled,
Since now at the Grapevine Pass
The first offensive was defeated,
Twenty slain and thirty wounded?
Yes, the war has only started,
On that mountain side's erupted,
What, oh *zana*'ll, be the outcome?
"No way out now but resistance,
I, the blessed *zana,* see how
Plava and Gucia've gathered,
See how Strellc and Plevia've mustered
Troops with Sutjeska and Nokshiq,
Vuthaj and Martinoviq and
Hoti i Kujit, Marina, Isniq,
Gashi, Krasniqi, Reç and Dardha,
Qafë e Diellit, Lum i Bardhë,
Nikaj, Palç and, yes, Merturi,
All who've never shamed their rifles.
And the black-haired Ali Pasha
Was the one to be their leader,
Riding on his dappled courser,
Like clouds looming 'fore a rainstorm
When they weep on Haramia.
With them other daring fellows
Came, some bayraktars and chieftains,
Others beys and many agas,
One of them Çerim Binaku,
Bloodshed everywhere he ventured,
With him was Sadri Mehmeti,
Even known unto the sultan,
One from Gashi, one Krasniqi,
Using *novicas* like handguns.
With them came, too, Jakup Feri,
Man from Plava, falcon son he,
Well adapted for the war grounds,
And that lion's cub from Hoti,
Alush Smajli, Smajl Hasan's son.
When he twirls his sharpened sword you'll
Find your head's not on your body,
How it flashes out like lightning!
I have seen full many a hero,

But I've seen none like Prêlë Tuli,
Who has led the tribe Merturi
With two pistols and a ramrod,
Huta shouldered, soul in fervour.
In his tracks and in his footsteps
Venture Omer, Hasan Haxhí,
One from Isniq, one from Nokshiq,
Woe to anyone their victim,
For the grave they will prepare him.
Then the flower of youth did follow,
All those falcons from the Highlands,
Now advancing on Sutjeska,
No opponent went unvanquished
And no forces went unscattered
Which had come to show resistance."
Thus she spoke out, the Great *Zana*,
And from cliff to cliff a-winging
Did the Good One hasten thither,
'til above Sutjeska perching,
On an alpine cliff she landed,
Where she sat and took her leisure,
Waiting, watching what would happen
There where *shkjas* and where Albanians
Set at, grappled one another.

Canto 18

AT SUTJESKA BRIDGE

Mark Milani's forces converge on the Sutjeska Bridge to take Gucia, but Ali Pasha of Gucia is lying in wait with two thousand Albanian fighters. The whole canto is devoted to the fierce battle, with descriptions of the individual warriors and their gruesome deeds in a struggle to the death. A blackbird offers a poignant lament on the death of Smajl Arifi. But the mother of Cen Brahimi is to be lamented, too, for her son has dishonoured himself by not avenging the death of his blood brother Sadri Çuni in battle. Sadri's head is impaled by the Slavs, hoisted on a pole and paraded before the Albanians in derision.

Mark Milani, when he saw that
At the Grapevine Pass no trail would
Lead him, help him take Gucia
With his eight army battalions,
Made his move against Sutjeska
In the night with no one watching,
Just as sly Nikolla'd ordered,
Hoping he would pick a pathway
Which would bring him to Gucia,
With no dogs or cubs out barking.
But the bastard was mistaken,
For now Ali Pasha turned up
With two thousand of his fighters,
All were eagles, kites and falcons.
There they lay for him in waiting,
Set with Mark to launch the battle,
Not to give in without fighting.
And at breakfast time the battle
Broke out while the sun was rising.
Please be with us, God Almighty!
For today we will see trouble.
'mongst those cliffs down in Sutjeska.
Men are poised with men to skirmish,
Shkjas, Albanians, at each other,
Born to hate, detest each other,
There they'll fight and will be slaughtered.
Warriors like wild boars in bloodshed

Will be lying in the bushes,
No one there to grieve or mourn them,
No lament from wives or sisters
And no wretched mothers there to
Speak a final word of comfort.
Thus commenced the din and clamour,
Thus began the rifles firing
And the sound of cannons roaring,
Hail of shots and bullets rang out,
Fierce enough your ears to deafen.
Fumes to blind your eyes did thicken,
Had you heads one hundred on you
And a pair of horns for each one,
You'd not get back home, I venture,
Safe and sound, oh noble fighter.
As in storms, when lightning lashes,
Flashed the *hutas* and *novicas*
Over beeches, rocks and tree trunks,
Howls and screeches echoed there like
Neighing foals when put to threshing,
Like those wolves by hunger driven
When the snowflakes smother pastures.
And at noontime was the shooting
Of the rifles yet unbroken.
Rumbling, beating seethed and echoed,
Never stopping, never ceasing,
Like a hailstorm ever nearer
Breaking hearts of weary farmers.
Thus the guns continued firing
To the roar of savage cannons,
All the while rose shrieks and bellows,
All the while their blood was boiling,
Here and there the *shkjas*, Albanians
Made their stance and fled positions,
Unconcerned for life or death the
Heroes slashed at one another.
Step by step did they progress while
Swarming over fields like locusts.
How the battle raged and rumbled,
How the din and clash resounded,
How the noise of crackling rifles
Roiled to make you lose your reason.

How they grappled, how they tangled,
Barrels aimed at one another,
There attacking and retreating.
Many heroes lost their lives
Upon that barren mountain clearing.
All the worse for us the fact that
With the *shkjas* we share a border,
Evil-minded folk and cagey,
Yet they are courageous fighters!
First to fall, Selim the falcon,
Son he of Selman Ymeri,
Ancient household of Plevia,
Folk with cattle, folk with stables,
Sheep and goats in their possession
In the Highlands and the lowlands,
Noblest family of the mountains.
Never did he make a promise,
Take an oath he could not keep, or
Leave a blood wound unrequited.
Now a rifle's felled the fellow
Just as he was seeking shelter
'cross the field behind an oak stump.
Then was slain Beqir Haxhija,
Famed afar he for his courage,
Much sought after for his wisdom,
By his head did swear Gucia.
Ne'er at home or in Montenegro
Did he fail as host his duties,
Did he fail to give protection,
Always wanted to serve justice,
Fate's now shortened his existence.
Slain's another lad from Plevia
Without father, without mother,
Kurt Zeneli's what they called him.
In the throat the rifle got him,
On that fallow field he stretches,
Bathed in blood the barren clearing,
Gore as if a steer had perished.
Steva Plevanaci slew him,
Petty thief and evil-doer,
Hardly can the earth endure him.
But for chapel desecration,

There's no crime he's not committed
'gainst his friends and foes on earth, he
Robs at night and plunders daily,
Slaughters some and shames the others,
Other people's land he's selling.
With his sleeves rolled to his shoulders
He caught sight of Kurt Zeneli,
While he aimed his rifle, pointing
At a young lad come from Nikshiq,
And the *shkja* with his *novica*
Struck the lad above the navel,
Dead upon his back he faltered.
But that Slavic scion was not
Careful when he fired his rifle,
For Adush Haliti shot him
In the head and spewed his brains out,
Scattered hair and hood, *kapica*,
Like a salt vat was his skull split,
In the creek lay dead his body.
Trees and stones were all lamenting,
Now they mourn a lad from Dardha,
Hero like those ancient heroes,
Never did his eyelids tremble,
Mican Leka has now perished,
Stubby fellow, but untiring,
Up on end his curly topknot,
Like the bristles of a boar's hide,
Oxbow eyebrows over snake's eyes.
Every time he went to battle,
Did he make himself the centre,
On the backs of foes he swooped as
If he'd been a falcon, goshawk,
Eat them up alive, he seemed to.
He caught sight of Nikë Mihajli
Who had aimed at Zyber Smajli,
Zyber that young lad from Reç, and
Shot him dead upon the ground there,
And on Nikë he turned his *huta*,
Fired and hit him in the belly,
Spread intestines o'er the meadow.
Reeling, shrieked the *shkja* convulsing,
Step by step he tottered sideways

Bent, with both hands on his stomach.
'til the fellow fainted, failing,
Slanting like a wooden pole, he
Headfirst plunged into a pond, his
Face in mud, his legs stretched upwards,
Two then three times slapped his thighs and
All the while his feet swung loosely,
Gave the ghost up, tumbled, splashing
One foot deep into the water,
Scarlet red the pond did shimmer.
Juriq Mata, ugly fellow
In his longish woollen trousers,
When he saw how Mican slaughtered
Nikë, poor lad, he did not falter,
To his feet arose the fighter,
Clenched between his teeth a sabre,
Wildly firing his *novica*,
Charged at Mican striving either
There without delay to shoot him
Or to chop the head off Mican.
Like a bear that senses danger
When a wild boar nears its cavern,
Comes with tusks to tear, destroy it,
On its back with hand-long bristles,
Will it burst upon the wild boar,
Leap on bristled back and claw it,
Tear to pieces the intruder,
Soak in blood and gore its victim.
So then Mican, when he noticed
Juriq Mata was attacking,
Cocked and swiftly aimed his *huta*,
To his feet he rose and ventured,
Face to face stood the two fighters,
Both their weapons fired in fury,
Juriq tumbled and was slaughtered,
Mican fell, was hardly living,
In the breast shot by the rifle,
O'er the fallow field he lay there,
Bathed in his own blood, poor fellow,
Broke the heart of his dear mother.
Thus the wretched Mican Leka,
Hands on heart and death awaiting,

Head on hummock, feet in furrows,
Under him, Martini rifle,
From his body blood was rushing,
Turned and spoke to comrades gathered:
"I've one last wish, my companions,
Should you ever pass through Dardha,
Take my weapons hither with you,
Leave them for me in the courtyard,
Do not show them to my parents,
For they're old and that would blind them.
Should my mother ask about me,
Tell her that her son has married,
Should she ask what bride I've taken,
Say I took, have wed a bullet,
Should she ask who was my witness,
Say three ravens did attend me,
Should she ask what ladies sang there,
Say three crows cawed, sank their claws in.
Tell her: do not grieve, poor mother,
Mourn not Mican who has perished,
Died while fighting Montenegro
Which has cut down and has stolen
Many young lads from Albania,
Some on purpose, some at random,
All the best the country offers."
His life snuffed out like a candle.
Oh, my good son, Mican Leka,
Well did your dear, wretched mother
Teach you once and then exhort you
When you set out for Sutjeska,
For that war with its *shejshanas*:
"Listen to me, God preserve you,
When you with the *shkjas* do battle,
Well remember, do I beg you,
What this ancient woman cautions:
There's no war and there's no wedding
Without meat, so do be careful,
Many fellows fall in fighting,
For you'll see that on the war grounds
Heads are but a dime a dozen."
But you did not heed your mother,
And besieged the *shkjas* in fury,

Like wild beasts in January.
Shooting, firing all around you
Did you slay Pavlo Serdari,
Leave to bleed that wretched fighter,
Then shoot Stanku and then Janku,
Also slay Veshoviq Branku,
Veshoviq, that daring fellow,
Who had felled Nel Gila near you,
That poor shepherd boy from Vuthaj
Who had left his goats and sheep to
Join the army as a soldier
Off to fight with Montenegro?
Thus, beloved Mican Leka,
No need for you to be mourning
Life and youth, for you've resisted,
Well yourself you've vindicated,
Left no shame upon your country,
Thus your name will live forever
On a Highland Lute exalted
When Albania's day approaches.
Now that Mata and Mican had
Fallen, died upon the war grounds,
Cannons, mortars still were pounding,
Hutas and *novicas* sounding,
Brezovica's valley echoed.
Many more *shkjas* and Albanians
Fell upon the earth and perished,
Groups of two, three, five and six, some
In the open, some in beech groves,
Some were young and others older,
All were fighters, handsome heroes,
Where they fell, like mountain falcons,
Making trees and boulders mourn them,
Mourn Oso of Shas Alltuni,
Zeqir Meta and Metë Xhelili,
Both the sons of Man Halili,
Nightingale that Osman Sela,
Janjiq Mirko, Tomiq Pera,
Rrahman Duli like a viper,
Head to head with Jeliq Gjura,
Who in Kotor sold his icon
Bought for it instead a pistol,

Which the *shkja* then brought to battle,
Shot and wounded Rrahman with it.
Rrahman, just before he perished,
Struck the *shkja* well with his sabre,
Split in two the head upon him,
Split it like a gourd or melon.
These two fighters, no denying,
Were like savage beasts or *drangues*.
What's the blackbird there now singing
'mongst the cypress trees while winging
Through the gorges of Gucia?
"Plains and mountains, listen to me,
Cease your singing, cease your prancing,
Cease your dancing so to mourn him,
In Krasniqi do they say that
Smajl Arifi's fallen victim
Fighting *shkjas* down in Sutjeska.
Greatly will his mother grieve him
When she hears her Smajl is no more,
Smajl, that giant hero's perished.
Wide as war grounds was his forehead,
Like gunpowder sparked his eyeballs,
Slender body like a flagpole,
Ear to ear did wind his whiskers,
Such fine lads are born no longer."
Still your voice, bird of the mountains,
For you know not what you're saying,
You know but to trill and twitter,
Flying, flitting 'mongst the branches.
Wherefore should Smajl's mother mourn him,
Since that hero, Sadik Rama,
Paid the deed back, well avenged him,
Two he killed and three he wounded?
Cen Brahimi, let his mother
Mourn him. Seeing his blood brother,
Sadri, son of Çun Selimi,
In the chest struck by a rifle,
Did he rise and like a mule head,
Stubborn, stupid, started fleeing,
Left his brother dead behind him,
Putting thus to shame his homeland.
For the *shkjas* seized Sadri's head and

Thrust it on a pole as trophy,
To be fed to crows and falcons.
Then they started bragging, boasting:
"Welcome to you, Ali Pasha,
Take a look here at this pole top,
For it seems that Sadri Çuni
Has a word to utter to you,
Seems he has a wish, oh pasha,
Asks of you that Mark Milani,
Mark Milani, famous captain,
In the mosque enjoy his breakfast,
Lunch in Plava, sup in Gucia,
Where he wants to take his leisure,
Then, if it is written, will he
Journey downwards on to Shkodra,
Set on Shkodra his *kapica,*
And will plant his *trobojnica*
In the fortress of Rozafat."
When the Pasha of Gucia
Sadri's head beheld there mounted,
Heard how loud the *shkjas* were bragging,
Like an ox he turned and bellowed,
Cliff to cliff his roar resounded:
"Where are all you men of courage?
For to shame the *shkjas* have put us,
Tainted weapons and our faces
If we don't 'venge Sadri Çuni
Two for one as is our custom."
As in summer when the shepherd
Calls out to his lambs while lounging
In the shade beside the water,
Sheep and goats do hasten to him,
So the Highland men did hustle,
Thus the bloom of youth came hither.
Hearing call Gucia's pasha
Did they set forth, not delaying,
Firing cannons, firing mortars,
Firing rifles all around them,
In their hands were shining sabres,
With a scream your skull to fracture,
Down to fight the *shkjas* they hastened
There where on a pole implanted

Was the head of Sadri Çuni.
Ever seen the bees when angry,
How they buzz and swarm in fury
'round the entrance of a cavern
When they see a bear approaching
There to stick its dirty nose in
To the honeycomb to lick it?
Thus the Montenegrins angry
Went wild in their rage and fury
When they saw the Albanians striding
Forth like *drangues* and Cyclopes,
Some like bears and others lions,
All were famed and lauded heroes.
In their rage they seized their sabres,
Forthwith did they leave their ambush,
Blood in eyes and gall in faces,
O'er one brow perched their *kapicas,*
And their ranks, assaulting ventured
Forth with strident cries and screaming,
Sallied forth as earthly heroes
Like the wolves in late November.
Oh great Lord, 'tis Thee we worship,
When they reached that wide field, when
Albanians and the *shkjas* arrived there,
How they then commenced the killing,
How they then began the slaughter,
Heads and arms with sabres slicing,
Lopped off lips and nipped off noses,
Biting into one another,
Like the wild boars at a she-bear.
All the field in blood was brimming,
As the men advanced, assaulting,
As they struck, hit and retreated.
Then they turned and bent their bodies,
And in rage they raised their sabres,
Now defending, now attacking,
Not to save themselves from danger,
But to leave the others headless,
Not to save their lives they struggled,
But to strike home with their weapons,
Hack off heads, you'd think them melons
To be plucked, proffered at market,

Think them apples, duelling-tokens.
Cannons, mortars now ceased firing,
Rifles, voices then fell silent,
Heard alone was but the clank of
Savage sabres wildly slashing,
Hewing heads and shearing shoulders,
Bashing buckles, tearing tunics,
Like the harvester when reaping.
Shkrapiq Pera, foolish fellow,
Set upon his foe, assaulting,
Launched himself 'gainst the Albanians,
Seemed to want to gulp them living.
There Sulë Mema waited for him,
Still a lad he from White River,
Thin as an Italian rifle.
Then the fellow set to vaunting,
Rushed to chop his victim's head off,
Take it to the prince as present.
But his venture was mistaken,
Qerim Çela, falcon son he,
Sliced his head off with his sabre,
Splitting in two halves the forehead,
Like from Bar a pomegranate,
Splashed the brains across the meadow.
Like a swarm of flies did Bozhiq
Bound at Qerim with his billhook,
Vault at him as would a viper,
For the *shkja* there had no sabre.
And indeed the valiant fighter
Beat back Qerim with his billhook,
Qerim'd never had occasion
Since his birth to fight with billhooks.
What did Llazo Bjela utter?
"Slow your pace, oh Qerim Çela,
For you're being faced with phantoms
Who slash at you with their sickles,
With their sickles, scythes and billhooks,
They'll not let you go, believe me!"
Then the *shkja* did raise his sickle,
Swished and sliced one of his ears off,
Plunged the sickle in his shoulder,
Sent him sprawling o'er the clearing.

Lightning-like then, Bozhiq with his
Billhook lunged, the head to sever,
But he had no luck in lopping.
Eagle-like, Omer Haxhija,
Flew at him, that earthly hero,
He the voyvode of Nokshiq, as
Flames and sparks his eyes emitted,
And in one fell swoop he chopped the
Head off Bozhiq, sent it tumbling.
Llazo fled behind his comrades,
For he saw that war's unlikely
E'er to pamper any fighter.
Bozhiq, though, did have a nephew,
Nephew with three hearts inside him,
Never did his heels retreat, not
Even faced with mortars firing
Or the sharpened steel of sabres.
He was always on the war grounds,
Stojan Rade's what they called him,
Stocky lad, but supple sapling,
Eyes with gore and gall were swollen.
When he saw his wretched uncle
On the ground and drowned in blood he
Bit the lip under his whiskers,
Jumped at him, Omer Haxhija,
On his two feet tried to take him,
But Omer was not for taking,
Like a bear he from Peshteri,
One which awes men with its shadow,
Head with knobs and bumps abounding,
Eyebrows yarn-like curled protruding,
And a pair of swarthy whiskers
To his waist belt dangled from him.
Like a giant was his body,
Bloody eyes just like Cyclopes,
Forearms stalwart and outstretching
Like the branches of a beech tree,
Hairy limbs with veins and muscles,
Even a *kulshedra*'d cower.
When this fellow cast his eye and
Saw the hated *shkja* approaching,
Swiftly did the hero turn and

Swiftly set upon the other,
Gnashing teeth and molars that you'd
Think he'd eat and gulp his foe down.
Seeing sabre brandished did the
Shkja though soon repent, for Omer
Lunged at him all of a sudden,
Put the *shkja* on the defensive,
Like an eel he squirmed and wriggled,
That you'd think the Slavic scion'd
Tried to hide within an ox horn,
Rolled into a ball, poor fellow,
Soon as Omer raised his sabre,
He did not know where to run to,
What to do to keep his head on,
But two Montenegrins spied him,
Copper-toned one, other ruddy,
Nehmanj Savo and Zvekan Pavo,
Saw him fallen on the war grounds,
Hardly with his head still on him.
Thunderbolts, the two sped for him,
There to help their fallen comrade.
"Slow your pace," cried Jakup Feri,
Hissing to them like a viper,
"Three to one is not the custom
Heroes hold to on the war grounds!"
And the fellow drew his sabre,
Looked as if he'd slice and slash them,
Slice and slash them all to pieces.
Todor came, of giant stature,
With him were two lads from Njegush,
One called Musa, other Mili.
Jakup leaped at them like lightning,
One alone to slay a threesome,
As if they with sticks were sparring.
"Don't let up, oh Jakup Aga,"
Shouted to him, loudly calling,
Alush Smajli from Hoti i Kujit
With a lad from Buza e Ujit
Who'd been visiting Gucia,
Who had heard the war cry sounded,
Gjeto Preka's what they called him,
Lad who'd gnaw through bars of iron,

Neck two palms thick, eyes a-glowing.
Both to help Jakup did hasten,
Beat like hail hurled by the north wind.
Now the heroes started battling,
Neck to neck with *shkjas* combatting
As has always been our custom,
Way of life up in the Highlands,
Face to face to fight the *shkjas* and
Cause much grief to Slavic mothers.
One side struck, then slammed the other,
One attacked and one receded,
Back and forth assaulting, thrusting,
Bathed in blood up to their forearms,
Much gore dripped from handheld sabres
When the savage heroes whirled them,
When they set at one another.
Din and clamour was ascending,
Such the screaming of the fighters
That, my friend, you'd be in panic,
Now for more *shkjas* and Albanians
Like wild beasts did take up battle,
Killing one another as if
In excess was their existence.
On the war grounds like a snake pit
All entangled were the heroes,
Seemed to stem from sombre soil there
And not born of human mothers.
They for life or death did care not,
All those heroes joined in combat,
Joined in conflict, joined in fighting,
As they savaged one another,
Locked in battle, *shkja* and Albanian,
Some were always wielding sabres,
Others grappled in hand combat,
Made the soil beneath them tremble,
Bit the throats of one another
As the hounds do when attacking
Lone wolves prowling in the mountains.
Soon thereafter heads were rolling,
Flung upon the ground, what horror!
To be ravaged by the ravens,
Crows and jackdaws chawing on them.

Bozhiq's nephew fell in battle,
As did fall Savo Jukiqi,
With the army chief from Nikshiq,
Three slain by Omer Haxhija.
Then did fall Llano Kadrija,
He a chief from Dragobia,
Myrto, son of Can Faslia,
Fell, who first a *shkja* had slain, for
When he tried to slay another,
Snuck one Lluko from Cetinje
Up behind him with a sabre,
Left the wretched fighter headless,
Headless and his mother blinded
For she had no sons left to her.
Lluko lost his reason, boasting
After slaughtering poor Myrto,
How he bragged and how he vaunted,
How he ventured forth, assaulting
Jakup Feri, *drangue* hero,
Flew at him to chop his head off,
But in fact his own was lacking,
For when he there raised his sabre,
Jakup took a quick step backwards,
And more swiftly then attacking,
Seized the *shkja*'s hand, grasped it firmly,
Held it right between his clutches
Like the claws of a *kulshedra,*
Drove the sword into his belly,
Slit his guts like tripe and tore the
Trousers he was wearing open.
And, alas, died Basho Jana,
Of Merturi, like a *zana,*
Died his nephew, too, Prêlë Tuli,
Who that year'd returned from Mosul
Where the sultan'd ostracized him
For a feud he had to settle.
He and Prêlë fell on Gucia,
There to fight with Montenegro,
There to perish for their homeland.
With a *shkja* he set to fighting,
Drenched in blood were both the fighters.
He was poised to raise his sabre,

Chop his foe's head in two pieces,
But the *shkja* did lunge more swiftly,
In his chest he rammed his sabre,
Left him on the ground to wither.
His *kumara*, that Balë Gjoni
With the black hair, saw that Basha
In a pool of blood had perished,
Shrank not, taking flight, but rather
Pounded like a bolt of lightning
On the *shkja*'s head with his rifle
Butt and smashed it into pieces,
In a heap collapsed the fighter.
Like a Cyclops did he rage and
Cry out loudly to Prêlë Tuli:
"Prêlë, where are you, wretched fellow,
For your nephew's health has failed him,
For your nephew has been slaughtered,
Leave the deed not unatoned for."
At that moment Prêlë had slain and
To the ground felled one Nikica,
Stocky man from Andrijevica.
He was like an eagle ready
Then to pounce upon two other
Shkjas when he heard Bala calling.
Long the hero did not linger,
Forwards rushed to find Balë Gjoni,
Frowning face and eyes like lightning,
As a steer, when having listened
To an ox or bull calf lowing,
Charges over fallow pastures
Where his heart to fight commands him.
But when he charged o'er the clearing,
There appeared a *shkja* before him,
Terrifying when caught sight of
With a head as high as house beams,
Full of knobs and gnarls his head was,
With his whiskers downwards twisted
Like the tails of two black rams, and
Like a cairn his mighty shoulders,
Arms as thick as shafts of wagons,
Knees and legs, pure steel you'd think them,
Think, too, that a pair of oxen

From the spot could not remove him,
Body awesome like a haystack,
Hairy face and oxbow eyebrows,
Jacket tailored to his bottom,
He resembled death in person.
There to Prêlë he stammered, saying,
"Is it really you, Prêlë Tuli,
Who've become a butcher 'mongst us,
Who've been slaying all our people
Like you'd lop the heads off livestock?
I'd have wished you were in heaven,
But since here on earth I've met you,
I can't leave you with your head on,"
And attacked like a *kulshedra*
Almost stamped him in the earth nine
Paces deep, but Prêlë reacted,
Swiftly warding off the sabre.
How the sparks flew off those sabres!
How they broke in twain, oh *zanas*,
Fell like wood chips in the river!
In their hands were left the handles,
Then they flew at one another,
Grappled, twisting hard and turning,
Yet they could not fell each other.
While they tumbled and they wrestled
Did they boast at one another
As they stumbled towards the clearing,
While the earth around them shuddered
As from cannons in the distance.
Thus the *shkja* Vasil spoke, vaunting,
For Vasil was what they called him:
"I have grappled many Turks and
Fought them, slain them in Berane,
Heads I've sliced off in Babune,
In Babune and in Shpuza,
In Kernica, Podgorica,
Therefore, Prêlë, my wretched fellow,
Don't you know I'll chop your head off?"
What did Prêlë then answer, saying?
"Well, it seems, my swarthy Vasil,
Up to now with Turks you've battled,
Heads off Moors you may have chopped and

Heads off Zeybeks may have sliced, but
Now you're facing an Albanian,
One who's skilled in arms and warfare,
One who values honour, valour,
Good as gold his word of honour,
And your head I'm going to sever
Like you lopped the heads off livestock,
And in black will I envelop
That poor wife back in your household,
Slavic woman, withered tree stump."
How the words of Prêlë did vex him,
And in anger he responded:
"Let me tell you, Prêlë, my fellow,
By Saint Peter of Cetinje,
Less than snuff's worth an Albanian
And two times alive I'll eat you,
For, long live the *gospodari*,
We will conquer your Albania,
And we'll enter into Shkodra,
And deposit our *kapicas*
On the heads of the Albanians,
Be they heroes or whatever!
Not on your head, Prêlë, my fellow,
Have no fear that this could happen.
From your nape your pate will sever
Uncle Vasil and impale it,
Food for hooded crows and falcons.
For a cap or a *kapica*
Will you have a need no longer!"
Prêlë then had a fit of laughter:
"Seems to me, my poor Vasil, that
Death approaching's numbed your reason,
Now you're raving like a madman,
For I'm just about to fell you,
Chop your head off in an instant,
Steadfast, Vasil, you're in trouble!"
With their mighty arms they wrestled,
O'er the rocks the heroes tumbled,
Bodies bashed against the tree trunks,
In their lairs took flight the serpents
As the rugged clearing shuddered,
Leaves on mountain oaks did rustle.

Sallow at the mouth, they foamed and
Streams of sweat flowed down their bodies.
Straining, pounding one another,
Did the heroes pant in fury,
Strive to overcome each other,
But they could not, getting nowhere,
Like a saw which strikes a nail, until
That clever fellow Prêlë then
Turned unto the *shkja* and shouted:
"Vasil, as God is my witness,
From some signs that I've been seeing,
Do I fear you have a problem.
While we're grappling and we're fighting
Over us a raven's flying,
In the air he's ever cawing,
Bird of doom, it's you he's after."
To the sky the *shkja* gazed upwards,
Prêlë was ready for the moment,
Swiftly kicked him, sent him reeling,
Like a pile of leaves the *shkja* lay
In a heap across the clearing,
Underfoot the clearing shuddered.
How he gnashed his teeth, that Prêlë, and
Swiftly drew his dagger, plunged it
Well and deep into the *shkja*'s ribs,
Streams of blood were seething, gushing,
How the *shkja* did struggle still, his
Hands and feet were pounding, thumping
As he writhed upon the soil as
Would an ox do when the butcher
Drives right to the bone his cleaver,
Such that even mice in walls or
Snakes on stones would now take pity.
Prêlë, however, knew no pity
For the foes of the Albanians.
With a knife he sliced his head off,
Like you'd lop the heads off livestock,
Left the headless *shkja* there lying
On the pasture, seized the head then
By the tuft of hair upon it,
Whirled it, swung it round about him,
Hurled it towards the Slavic trenches,

Like a conscientious farmer'd
Hurl the melons from his farmland
If he found that they were rotten,
Hurl them to the swine and piglets
Roaming nearby fields for fodder.
Then he started boasting, bragging:
"There you have it, Mark Milani,
Greetings from Gucia's pasha,
Welcome to you if you're coming
Here for breakfast, lunch or dinner,
Here to Plava or Gucia.
Here's your meal, it's waiting for you:
Heavy bullets, black gunpowder,
Have this melon for a starter,
For the prince it is a present,
Tasty fruit for Montenegro
That's been plucked here in Albania,
Let him share it with his comrades."
When a traveller on his journey
Is attacked by dogs and hounds, and
Hurls a rock or clod out, will the
Beasts all go berserk with anger,
Firstly following the object,
Then with even greater fury
Will assault, attack the traveller.
Just like them the Montenegrins
Followed Vasil's head, receding,
Ran back to where Prêlë had heaved it.
When they saw what was before them,
Saw that Vasil was no longer,
God Almighty be my witness!
How their lips did turn to charcoal,
How they twisted, squirmed and wriggled,
How they chafed and boiled in anger,
Rushed in rage at the Albanians,
Caring not for paths or boulders,
Without sandals or *kapicas*,
Seized their sabres and *novicas*.
From their eyes flew sparks of fury
As they howled and shrieked and bellowed,
Flooding over hills and flat land,
Like the wolves from Sopat's mountains

When they're hungry and afflicted,
Firing mortars, firing cannons,
Rifles, din and clamour echoed,
Raising smoke and stirring terror,
Fighters perished in the torrents.
Like salt barrels heads were broken,
Split like seashells or like walnuts.
Then the Albanians fled their trenches,
Hastened up through gorges, clearings,
'til they reached the mountain pastures,
And the Slavs fell on Sutjeska,
From that bridge they torched the country
Down the road towards Kelmendi.

Canto 19

FATHER GJON

In impassioned and patriotic invective, Father Gjon of Kelmendi denounces the dastardly deeds of the Slavs who for five hundred years have done nothing but torment the Albanians and take their land. Yet the Highlanders are a hardy race and have survived. Were he not a priest, he would take to arms himself to defend his mountain homeland. Father Gjon sets off for Sutjeska with the men of Kelmendi behind him while his young deacon, Lulash Ndreu, sings a patriotic song. As long as water flows in the River Drin, the Slavs shall not set foot on Albanian soil.

What cries out Miliskau's *Zana*?
"May the *shkja* race shrink and vanish.
Ever since it took the Balkans
Has it hounded the Albanians,
Without reason, without judgment,
Daily snatched their land and livestock,
Set on them with guns and cannons,
Never let them raise their heads up,
Never let them glimpse the sunlight,
Kept them in eternal sorrow,
Drenched in blood all of the country!
Yes, the *shkjas* are much like vampires,
Distant or close by they sit, yes,
Hurling weights at the Albanians,
Never letting them develop,
Striving to entomb them living.
We have always marked our border,
Hands outstretched and pledges swearing,
So we know where is Albania,
Where is Serbia, Montenegro.
But the *shkjas* then move the landmarks
So that they can rule the country.
Should the Albanians start a venture,
Will the *shkjas* come and impede it,
Steal from them their trade and commerce,
Give protection to their killers,
Yes, they're cruel, can't be trusted,

Sombre glances, shady eyes, who
Think of nothing but of how to
Rid the world of the Albanians.
Would that God cause them to falter,
Make them gobble with their own teeth
Land and sons and wives and livestock!"
Let's not, *zana,* sit 'round cursing,
Cursing is the weak one's weapon,
Never has a foe blinked from it,
Cursing's only made them chuckle,
Or coaxed forth at least a grimace.
Cursing's never won a battle,
Nor have moaning and lamenting,
Words of nonsense at the fireside.
Rather hearts when full of courage,
Rather guns and black gunpowder,
Freedom's will, yes, they can conquer,
As can steely pledges which are
Steadfast in the face of danger,
Firm when plied with bribes and money.
Our forefathers kept their *besa,*
Shrank from foe not without fighting,
When they swore to God Almighty
In the age of Castriota,
Struggled for their faith and homeland
With the Turks and with the *shkjas*. But
Now five hundred years have passed since
We have been without our rulers,
Left with no one to assist us,
Always fighting foreign neighbours,
Yet we're still alive and flailing.
We were left to drown in water,
Yet we reached firm land and safety.
Many foes, their mouths were gawping,
Tried to swallow the Albanians,
Make us and our country vanish,
And yet, naught can e'er destroy it.
No one can wipe out our people,
Burn them out with coals and fire.
Neither will the *shkjas* us vanquish
Even though they're strong as oxen.
Can you hear ravines and torrents

Boom and thunder loudly, *zana,*
As the Albanians in Sutjeska
With the *shkjas* do grapple, battling?
Come a-winging, cherry-eyed one,
Come and fly to Haramia,
There to see them and to hear how
They are fighting in Albania
For their homeland and for freedom.
On this very day, oh *zana,*
Let me tell you, in Sutjeska,
Blood will once again be flowing,
Cannons, guns will not be silent.
Since our lads fled to the mountains,
Montenegrins in Sutjeska've
Torched and ravaged homes and households,
Yet Albania can't be taken
Thus, from end to end be conquered,
Inch by inch without much bloodshed.
Every mountain here's a fortress,
Every fighter here's a lion
Who'll attack a hundred foe and
Fall if them he cannot vanquish.
Life for the Albanians is the
Black Death if they have no freedom.
Better dead than life in bondage,
Have a look, my lucky charm, you
Slender figure raised in rock springs,
Have a look at those brave fighters
Who are passing through Vermoshi,
Pacing swiftly that you'd think them
Members of a wedding party
Off to fetch a bride to pledge her.
No, they're not a wedding party
Off to fetch a bride to pledge her,
They are Lekas from the Highlands,
Summoned by Gucia's pasha,
Who are marching from Vishnjeva
To Sutjeska to do battle,
There to win the day, God willing,
Or to perish, but they'll never
While alive give up their country.
Do you know that black-cowled fellow

Striding midst the band of fighters?
Twice a cord around his waist and
On his chest a cross he bears while
Pacing barefoot 'mongst the poor folk
Or up front among the leaders,
Up the main road does he hasten.
He's the friar of Kelmendi,
Father Gjon's his name, oh *zana*,
Who together with his parish
Has arrived to join the army.
Such the duty of a shepherd
Who his flock does ne'er forsake and
Over paths and fords goes with them,
Anywhere his *ora* takes him,
With them singing, with them sighing.
When the war cry sounded he was
Serving at Vishnjeva chapel,
Saying mass and busy preaching,
At confession, at communion,
For Vishnjeva and Gjenoviq
Feast day with their guests were holding,
On that solemn morning came to
Church there many men and women,
Both their guests and from the parish.
Washed and dressed and well-adorned they
Sang their hymns and fired their rifles
As is custom on such feast days.
When the mass was nearly over,
Someone shouted loud as could be
From a dark cliff o'er Vishnjeva:
"One per household, men, to arms rise,
Join the soldiers at Sutjeska,
For the *shkja*'s attacked Gucia!"
In the air he shot his rifle,
To their feet leapt then the fighters,
Seized their arms and did assemble,
Did discuss with one another
What to do and to consider
Whether to depart for battle.
Then, praise be to God, stood up to
Speak Uc Gjoka, come from Hoti,
With his voice began to bellow:

"No one will survive the war here
In our poor and wretched Highlands,
If we fight with Montenegro.
For some theft or for some damage,
For a path or for a border,
We have killed them in Kernica,
Plundered them in Podgorica,
Shot in Shpuza and Pllanica,
In Gucia, in Pervia,
Spent the years as worst imagined,
Throat to throat with *shkjas* in combat,
Born we were as cannon fodder.
Therefore, men, it's my proposal
We abandon, leave the matter
To the Turks to fight the *shkjas* and
Let them tear each other's heads off,
Turks and *shkjas*, and gouge their eyes out.
Who cares? Let the devil take them!"
"I am with you, Uc, well spoken,"
Vocerr Prêçi answered, saying:
"What advantage is it to us
If we with the *shkjas* do battle?
We are slaves and always have been,
Nothing's worse than Turkish serfdom,
Sultan's knees pressed 'gainst our bellies,
Can he skin us with no razor,
Skin and strip us, no lamenting?
Always problems and misfortune."
"Yes, men," did respond Curr Ula,
"Yet I am of the impression
That the Turk is on his last legs,
Won't be with us here much longer.
Eagle-eyed, some daring fellow's
Going to kick him in the belly,
Send him headlong on his journey
Off to Mosul in the desert.
But the *shkjas*, if they should get in
To Albania, men, you know well,
They would never leave the country.
From a hook they'd hang us and if
Someone were to flee the hook, they'd
Make of him a landless nomad,

One devoid of tribe and homeland,
One without an inch of earth to
Call his home and dig his grave in,
Give his bones their rest eternal."
Vocerr Deda, answered, mocking:
"Waiting for the grass to grow? For
Years five hundred have we Christians
Cherished the illusion that the
Turks would any day be leaving;
Tear his coat and scratch his hide, but
Ever is a Turk a Turk and
With his coat and hide remains
Implanted in us like a pitchfork.
'Carry off those sacks and baskets!
Place the loads upon the Christian!'
Thus, it seems to me much wiser
That we keep out of this business.
Let our guests and parish neighbours
Go back to their homes and grace the
Table there with raki, pancakes,
Get a spit and let us roast some
Meat for dinner, it's a feast day,
Then we'll talk and will decide if
We should go or not, and whether
We'll with Turks and *shkjas* do battle,
We've got time enough to perish."
Father Gjon then spoke in fury,
Veins were swollen on his forehead:
"Highland fighters, you who've been the
Pride and glory of Albania,
You who, when you went to war did
Leave the planet in amazement
When you, brave as lions, battled,
Will you give the *shkjas* your country,
Sitting cross-legged, unused rifles,
While your fathers at that border
Where the Prince of Montenegro
Has turned up with all his army,
Yes, your fathers, earthly heroes,
Scions true of Scanderbeg, did
Bathe in blood that same position,
Making weep those Slavic mothers,

Then did fall and die as heroes,
On that barren slope did perish,
Died unmourned and unlamented,
Food for hooded crows and falcons?
But alive they didn't give their
Country up. And now, what horror!
On their bones the *shkjas* are treading,
On those bones they trample like the
Neighing foals when put to threshing,
No thorns underfoot do harm them,
None are after them or curse them.
Should they enter, grab Gucia,
Should they penetrate the Highlands,
No one on their march to halt them,
They will capture Shkodra's fortress,
Wipe the name off of Albania,
Graft their Slavic blood onto it,
Quash our customs and our *besa*,
Place upon us their *kapicas,*
For the Lekas now do shirk
Instead of rising to the battle,
Rising, old and young together,
Rising to protect their land and
Stop the prince in his invasion.
They would rather stay at home and
Lounge about and smoke tobacco,
Tending to their guests and meals, with
Mind on games and target practice,
Having fun and playing clown, or
Making merry in the meadows,
Being best at hitting targets,
As if Highland soil were nothing,
As if foreign were Albania.
Muslims, Christians seem not brothers
Though they speak a common language.
Had I not this cross and cord I'd
Take up weapons, rifle-firing.
Yes, a monk I, sworn to silence,
To the army would I hasten.
I'd not leave it unprotected,
Our Albania, this my homeland,
Our poor Highlands, withered tree stump.

I'm no bridegroom or attendant,
I've no children I must care for.
Mine are rousing words and reason
When I travel through Albania,
For I'll suffer not to see the
Ruthless *shkja* e'er come and mock us,
See him trumpet, saying that the
Highlands when suppressed and conquered,
When, alas, our land's surrendered,
Not a Leka could be found who
Bothered firing off his rifle.
Nonetheless, a priest can't murder,
But to mock them, who will stop me?
Nothing can I do but curse them,
Damn them without candle, paper,
With but tears in my eyes welling,
Tears with blood and gall a-brimming.
To that mountain pasture will I
Set off, leading to Sutjeska,
There I'll curse their fields and seed, and
Damn their Highlands and their lowlands,
Damn their sheep and goats forever
With their servants and their families,
Old and young, the women, children,
Fathers, sons and brothers, sisters,
Leaving no stone in their chimney."
Thus the priest spoke, then arising,
Put his cloak on and got ready.
With a lad whom he had taught to
Help him in the church at mass time,
Taught to read and to write letters,
Did he hasten up the hillside,
As if wings were at his ankles.
When the Highland Lekas witnessed
How the Servant of the Lord had
Set off for the mountain pastures
On his way now to Sutjeska,
Off to curse the *shkjas*, the heroes
To their feet did rise and gather.
How the earth did echo loudly
As they followed in his footsteps,
Up the hill they loped like lions.

"Where're you off to, Father?" shouted
Then Turk Shabi: "Off without us?
We're the head and you're the eyes, we're
Useless without one another.
Speak to us and we will listen,
Lead us and we'll surely follow,
Go through fire and water for you,
'gainst the prince or sultan's armies,
To bring freedom to the Highlands,
To bring sunlight to Albania,
And to strengthen our religion,
Not relinquishing our *besa*."
"Honour to you, Highlands!" cried the
Father, turning to his people,
"No part of Albania ever
Showed more courage, noble bearing,
Showed more courage than the Highlands,
Yet I deem you know, my friends, whose
Lives have always been a struggle,
That some wretched fellow here will
Die in battle, for there's always
Meat galore at wars and weddings,
All the more so with the *shkjas* who
Love to pick a fight and hasten
Off to war, both men and women.
Therefore, now, before you leave here,
To your knees fall, ask forgiveness
Of the Lord for your transgressions
Ever since He gave you reason,
And your sins I here will pardon,
No need now for a confession.
War's at hand, it cannot wait for
We have all been called to battle
Since our brothers are in peril!"
To their knees did fall the fighters,
Took their caps off, undid turbans,
Sought forgiveness of the Lord and
Blessed Father on that meadow,
Meekly did they beg His pardon.
To the heavens turned the priest where
Humans look for their salvation.
There he, humble, started praying:

"Blessed Lord Almighty, please take
Pity on these wretched people
Who have often sinned against you,
Daily seven times do even
Good men, yes, transgress against you,
But they've never left your fold and
Never turned their backs against you,
Though they lost their land and country,
Lost possessions and their money,
Lost their households and their families,
Took to rugged cliffs and mountains.
In despair their lives were spent at
Times with food, but often hungry,
On their backs were prince and sultan,
Europe with its kings betrayed them,
Would not help in their misfortune,
All routes of escape were sealed off,
Everywhere was grief awaiting.
Never did they once deny you,
Never ceased to sing your praises.
Thus, oh Lord, take pity on them,
Do not let the foe e'er harm them,
Save them rather from the peril,
Give them force to face the foe that
Hovers o'er them like an eagle
With its fierce and bloody talons,
Blocking them from seeing the sunlight."
When the prayer was over did he
Free them of their sins, transgressions.
Then the man of God exhorted:
"Rise up, sons of Castriota,
Throw yourselves now into battle
Just as once did your forefathers,
With God's help the *shkjas* we'll vanquish!"
To their feet did leap the fighters
And departed for Sutjeska,
Not just marching - running, flying!
Father Gjon spoke words of courage,
As he joined them on their journey.
How Martini rifles glistened,
How their pistols flashed in gun belts!
Sparks were glinting off their sabres

As they hastened on their venture,
Nowhere did the fighters banter,
In their breasts were they too full of
Blood and gall all mixed and raging,
How they panted in their anger
To make war on Montenegro!
When they'd crossed the mountain slope did
Lulash Ndreu, friar's deacon,
Start to sing a song which echoed
In the mountains, like the *zana*'s.
"We've been told that Petrograd did
Give its word to Montenegro,
Letting it invade Albania
Down to where the Drin's waves thunder.
In Cetinje, Prince Nikolla
Mighty army did he muster,
To invade our mountains where the
Mothers make their sons like falcons.
Who said to that Northern Bear that
In his hands was all of Europe,
Rights of others did not count, to
Rip a piece off if he wanted?'
Which God told the *shkjas*: 'Go, harvest
Where you did not plant, and sow your
Seed on foreign fields wherever,
All Albania's in your hands now?'
Slow down, bandit of Cetinje!
Now, you know, it's men you're fighting,
Men born of a rifle barrel.
Blood will run like fresh spring water,
For the Albanians are resolved to
Spill their blood in heated battle
Or to trample under heel in
Mud the *shkjas*' three-coloured banner.
Know that for their ancient country
Castriota's sons will perish,
Know that in Albanian veins the
Same blood flows as in our fathers'!
With your blood, you crazy fellow,
Will the sabre soon be sketching.
Europe, learn and listen now
What blood is boiling in our veins! So

Stand up, sons of Scanderbeg, both
Muslims, Christians, undivided!
Rise and set out for the war grounds,
Forwards strike like shafts of lightning,
Let us show the *gospodari,*
Starving in his home, Cetinje,
That the Albanians own this land,
Martini rifles will defend it.
Rise, Albania's pride, Mirdita,
Rise and battle for your country!
You, Bibë Doda, awesome sabre,
Hear us swearing at your grave side:
Arms in hand and breast in ardour
Just as you were always wont to,
Brow to brow 'gainst Montenegro,
Man to man we'll test our fighting.
Rise, Mbishkodra, send your sons to
Victory now o'er Prince Nikolla,
At the Cem the vizier 'waits you,
He who once invaded Stamboul,
Rise, oh Tosks and hasten swiftly,
Over rivers, over mountains,
By the Book did Naim Frashëri
Swear his land he'd not abandon.
Men from Dibra, from Bishkazi,
Soar and pounce like nimble eagles,
While the prince's cannons thunder.
Give your lives up for your country,
Better to be dead and buried
Than on earth alive be captured.
Those who'd lied down for their nation,
Die not, they are born anew, like
Pyrrhus, Leka, Castriota,
They to us this land bequeathed and
All the world knows it's entrusted
To us and we will protect it.
Hell itself, were it to rise with
Hordes come from the life thereafter,
We would not give up our homeland,
Knowing, though, we all would perish.
Rather would the mountains fall,
The Holy Mountain and Rumia,

Than, to *shkjas* enslaved, our country'd
Hang its head and show submission.
Where the sons of Scanderbeg
And where the sons of Dukagjini
Stand, the *shkjas* will never step as
Long as River Drin is flowing."

Canto 20

THE SONS OF LEKË DUKAGJINI

More gruesome scenes of battle are enacted at Sutjeska Bridge. The main Albanian warriors from the Highlands and their equally determined Slavic opponents are portrayed individually, like the warriors of Agamemnon and Priamos under the walls of ancient Troy. The meeting of the blood brothers of old, the Slav Milo Spasi and the Albanian Bec Patani, evokes the episode of Glaucus and Diomedes in the Iliad. In the midst of the fighting, the two recognize one another, exchange words of greeting and lean their heads on each other's shoulders as is custom. An interlude recounts the story of their friendship. Bec Patani brings his blood brother (Alb. *probatin*) to safety as Rrustem Uka arrives from Gucia with reinforcements. Night falls over the bloodbath.

All the while was Lulash singing
As they crossed the hills and mountains,
Slope by slope and brook by brook, they
Left behind the streams and rivers.
'til they finally reached Sutjeska.
When they neared Sutjeska could they
Hear from mountain pastures how the
Cannons and the guns were firing.
Soon they saw it, noticed clouds of
Smoke into the air arising,
Swirling over poor Sutjeska,
Houses, barns were burnt to ashes.
Then they met the women, children,
Fleeing with their few possessions.
Like a wolf pack, crazed and freezing,
Did they utter howls so piercing,
Fired their *hutas* in a volley,
Set off, streaming down the hillside,
Like a chunk of mountain broken
Off and hurtling down the valley,
Such the clatter, such the clamour,
As the Highland Lekas swept like
Bolts of lightning into battle.
Haramia's *zana* trembled,

As when vile clouds veil the sunlight.
"Either has a storm struck or the
Highlands have embarked for battle,
Or perhaps there's been an earthquake,"
Did the Good One stop to ponder.
From the din and shooting did the
Valleys and the canyons echo,
Even Vizitor did shudder,
Zeletini, too, resounded.
Slow down, bandit of Cetinje!
For it seems to me you didn't
Use your head and think the matter
Through before this land you entered,
For it is a vicious country,
One whose folk will pulverize you,
If it's not as friend you come here,
Even though long teeth defend you.
Can't you see, poor bastard, what is
Going to happen to your army
When attacked by Highland Lekas,
Just as when a storm is brewing,
Sleet beats down on Haramia,
Firs and pine trees there uprooting,
Crushing huts, destroying gardens,
Sending boulders down through meadows?
Praise be to our God Almighty,
How the smell of powder spread there,
As the *shkjas* fought with the Lekas
Ever loading, ever firing,
All the bullets hit their targets,
Fighters fled o'er paths and ridges,
Ducked on cliffs and dodged in meadows,
Fought and struggled, set off running,
As the cannons, mortars sounded,
To the clash of swords and sabres,
Slicing many men to pieces,
Some near brooks and some near torrents,
That you'd lose your mind and reason.
Mal Kaculi, noble son he,
Lay in wait behind an oak tree,
Took and aimed his English *huta*,
Shot a *shkja* right through the middle.

Then came thick-necked Lul Rapuka,
On the spot shot Vasil Marku
Through his ribs and out his shoulder.
Though his jacket was a-flaming
Did Gjokë Sava play the hero,
Sallied down the slopes while billows
Belched from out of his *novica*,
Set his aim at that Car Xhaxha
Hoped to slay him, shoot his head off,
But, that way it wasn't written.
Caruk Curi, waiting for him,
Crouched behind a rock in ambush,
Nailed him in the neck, that fellow,
On the cliff like tripe he floundered,
Blood gushed from his mouth, eyes failing,
On the spot he gave the ghost up.
But not unavenged the *shkja* was.
Toma Risto, ox-eyed lad he,
Took a shot at Gjo' Mirashi,
At his forehead aimed and maimed him,
On his back to earth did fling him.
Well had judged that Slavic scion.
Thrice did Gjo' cough up before he
Turned to one side in his torment,
Eyes soon dimmed and then he perished,
Prostrate 'cross the fallow pasture.
Lez Sotiri was a fighter,
Like a snake in ferns a-coiling,
Dauntless hero, curly whiskers,
Head so huge and eyes so fearsome.
If but in a dream you saw him,
You would faint from fright and panic.
In a glade within the forest
Round a cliff he lay in ambush,
He'd harmed many Highland heroes.
Shooting, firing all around him,
Had he hit both Nisho Loshi
And Losh Gjeli from that thicket,
And that poor lad, Murro Pati,
As they hiked off up the hillside;
Whether fleeing or resisting,
I don't know, they weren't too trusty.

Then the thug from Montenegro
Cast into the endless chasm
Keqo Mashi from Zagorja
Who on all fours crawling tried to
Shoot his own companion and
Betray him for a blood feud that had
Long ago been solved and settled.
But the Lord Almighty slew him,
Bullet in his back embedded,
Left him in a heap to rot there.
What did Cuba Deli utter?
"I've no father and no mother,
Just a bride, so I will act now
For the glory of the Highlands."
To his feet then flew the fighter,
And went after Lez Sotiri,
Roaring, screeching like a Cyclops,
Pounced upon him, plunged towards him
Like the grebes do in lake waters,
There he lay for Lez in waiting,
Put his *huta* to his shoulder,
Shot him to the ground and killed him.
Then he hacked the fellow's head off,
Hurled it o'er the ground a-spinning.
Like a savage beast did he then
Set on Ilia Boshkoviqi,
Who stood out as a bellwether,
Leading Montenegro's thug-flock,
Bit a bullet through his moustache,
Through his skull and out the back side,
Like a thunderbolt it slew him.
Then he felled Mhill Rodiqi,
Mhill Rodiqi, Slavic goshawk,
Who had just done in Ujk Gjeri,
Turning then to run away, but
Cuba killed him with his *huta,*
With a bullet through the armpit
Which emerged then through his eyebrow,
Flattened him much like a pancake,
Food for martens and for badgers,
Let his lonely mother mourn him,
For she has no sons remaining.

Bogiq Steva, that young fellow,
On his brow perched his *kapica*,
Scampering he crossed the mountain,
Sneaking up on Cuba Deli,
Wielding in his hand a sabre,
Tried to lop that hero's head off.
While in combat with a *shkja* did
Cuba hand to hand do battle.
With a hero from Ostrog whose
Name was Milosh Radovani,
Lethal like a sharpened scythe blade.
Mashi, son of Coku, spied him
As the *shkja* rushed towards the war grounds,
At him did he aim his *huta*,
Nicked him in the ear and nabbed him,
And the bullet went right through him.
Mashi, son of Coku, shouted:
"I have battled with the sultan,
All of Stamboul fears my cunning,
You now, Prince Nikolla, think that
You can take Plava, Gucia
With your Bogiq and the others
While the Highlands are still standing?
Have a look now at your Bogiq,
Eyes wide open, like a candle
Pallid he, with legs still shaking.
For, by God, by Him we worship,
When I make my mind up to
Protect the land of my forefathers,
I fear neither prince nor sultan!"
To his feet then rose the hero,
Like a banner, army-leading,
And did cry out to the Highlands:
"Farewell, Highlands, I am ready,
We're no hapless Moorish soldiers
Who're kept trudging in the trenches,
We are savage Highland fighters
Skilled at battling Montenegrins,
Hand to hand and brow to brow, and
Either we survive together
Or we die, but will not suffer
Shkjas to dwell within our borders."

Then into the *shkjas* he tore just
Like a wolf within a sheep fold,
Shredding one and shearing others,
Killing, quenching blood thirst, 'til the
Sheep and lambs are decimated.
How the young men of the Highlands
Leapt and how they brandished sabres!
Sparks and flames their eyes emitted,
As they hastened down the hillside
In pursuit of Coku's son as
Do on Vizitor the wolf packs,
Charging *shkjas* there, in their trenches.
When they found them in their foxholes,
How the *shkjas* were dazed and shaken,
How they shuddered, sprang to action.
Like a snake by flames surrounded
Was Sutjeska all ablaze now.
War cries spread in Highlands, lowlands,
Screaming reached the vaults of heaven,
As the fighters there did battle,
As they set on one another,
Heaving severed heads around them,
As the blood gushed, teemed in torrents.
Slavic women cursed the boulders,
Lashed the Lekas and the Highlands,
Wretched mothers, as they watched while
Smuggling foodstuffs to their army,
Saw the sons of Montenegro
Lying mutilated, slain where
Mashi and his men had struck them.
Mashi, son of Coku, hero
With those eyes that flash like lightning,
With a voice like thunder rumbling,
Where he goes and where he ventures,
Cliff to cliff and ridge to ridge he
On the *shkjas* wreaks great destruction,
Just like goats he slaughters fighters.
Llesh Nikë Daka, mighty hero,
Swore an oath by the Almighty,
Should he not nine *shkja* heads capture,
On a beam he'd hang his *huta*,
Send his sabre to the smith and

Have it hewn into a ploughshare,
Never more take part in councils.
Since Llesh is a man and hero,
One whose word can ne'er be broken,
Did he lash out at the *shkjas* and
Tear apart the Montenegrins,
Like a farmer with an axe who
Clears the slopes of withered tree stumps,
For a real man keeps his promise.
A brave man, Nikë Gjelosh Luli,
Eyes a-glowing, arms like fence posts,
Every time he twirled his sabre
Did he slay a captain, colonel,
Sliced into them, chopped their heads off,
Just like jugs at Vraka market.
Here's Dodë Prêçi, like a storm cloud,
What's that skull his hands are holding?
It's the head of a poor colonel,
Colonel Gavro, wretched fellow,
For as long as luck was with him
Did he hang the hodjas, hadjis,
Did he burn down mosques and tekkes,
Sold to Christians Muslim women.
Wide was known his reputation.
Now his reputation will be
That he's sprawled across the hillside.
No more will he, my companions,
Even frighten off the jackdaws
Who'll be at his heart a-pecking.
Yes, that bayraktar, Dodë Prêçi,
Mows the *shkjas* down like the grasslands,
No Albanian's any stronger!
Llazo's mother from that cliff mourned:
"Poor me, oh my son, what happened
That you took part in that army?
Now I see two lads approach in
Woollen jackets, white felt pants to
Chastise Montenegro's *çetas*.
I don't know who they could be, but
If you saw them dashing downwards,
Saw them cliff to cliff a-hopping,
You would think that they're *kulshedras*,

Neither guns nor cannons halt them.
Do not let them, God, confront him
For they'll gulp him down in one piece.
For your rifle and your sabre,
They'll not even let you use them.
Days of woe will you afford me.
Cursed be that man who first did
Send upon this earth his sons to
Wage a war and kill his fellow
Men; not wolves or beasts would do so.
Yes, that first man, that stone-hearted
Man did the *kulshedras* suckle,
He who loved to tread on others,
Stealing shamefully their goods, he
Had no thought for their poor mothers,
With the warfare waned their summers,
Grieving for their children broke them."
Yes, good woman, I believe you,
But you've no choice in the matter,
You must simply bear your sorrow,
Make of oaken pith your heart for
You, too, are a noble lady,
You're a Montenegrin falcon,
Like those maidens brave of old who
Fought for faith and fought for freedom,
You were wont to serve the army,
Mending wounds for all your sons and
Giving them fair words of courage
That they slaughter Turkish soldiers.
Do not give up hope, oh mother,
On this day when God decreed that
You of your son be bereft, and
Your heart wither while you're living.
It afflicts me, wretched mother,
Now to break your heart and tell you
That your son fell in the battle.
Yet I think that you're behind it
For you raised him as a fighter,
Taught him not to e'er take cover,
Taught him ne'er to flee from danger,
But to face the foe with courage
And to grapple on the war grounds,

Fight as if he were immortal,
You thought that his lightning sword would
Save his head from being lopped off.
When the Highland fighters thus did
Come assaulting like a windstorm,
Did your son, Llazo Gavrani,
Flee and hide behind a tree trunk
In a twinkling like a serpent
From a treetop downwards crawling.
There behind it he took refuge,
Firing ever his *zdragusha*
At the Lekas in the skirmish,
Back and forth amongst the bushes,
Some left headless, others earless
By his trusty lightning sabre,
Ever for more blood a-thirsting.
Only if yourself you'd seen it,
Could you tell what happened, lady,
How your son attacked in battle
Like a giant, like a *drangue*,
Slaying that lad, Dedel Bubi,
Son of Bub Keçota, and others,
Him, one of the best from Pelaj
Then Ujk Miri did he slaughter,
Rascal fighter come from Vukli,
Who'd have sold his brother, sister,
Had they given him the money,
Split his head top from his ear and
Caused all of his brains to splatter.
Like a jug of milk when shattered.
Like a wolf when at a lambkin
Did he launch out at Kolë Cuja,
With his bayoneted rifle.
Though he was not much to look at,
Kolë was hearty and courageous,
Not afraid of kings or sultan.
Kolë strove now to chop his head off
As a present for the prince, when
In a flash, without him seeing,
Two young fellows there attacked him,
Wearing jackets and felt trousers,
Yes, those two upon the hillside

Whom you saw while you were worried
For your son, like two *kulshedras*,
Neither gun nor cannon kills them.
Yet they are not two *kulshedras*,
Worse than that, Janja, believe me,
They are *drangues* of one mother,
Sword and sabre will not slay them,
Bec Patani and Çul Patani,
Here to fight upon the war grounds.
They charged at the prince's *çeta*
Like the waves upon the ocean
When in storm they strike a cliffside.
From the battle and the carnage
Shots rang out and voices thundered,
Fighting raged among the heroes
As the din and clamour echoed.
Dust and smoke did fill the air as
Pates were pared off, flung like pitchers,
Giant heroes lay there headless,
Broken, sprawling, all those young men,
All those youths, those bullish fighters,
Stones and trees took pity on them,
All the more did mourn their mothers
Who with care and love had raised them.
Oh, alas for Nesh Jovani!
Woe, for wretched Nikë Stjepani
And for Gjokë Serdari's mother!
Grief's befallen Llazar's sister!
Todor's bride is now a widow!
Bec did slay him with this sabre,
Split his chest in two, poor fellow,
And did chop the head off Gjuro,
Who among the *shkjas* was bravest,
Never have I seen his equal.
There midst chaos and confusion
Swooned your son beside a thornbush,
Çul had chopped him in two pieces!
Oh Lord, what has happened to us
Since that curse befell us, saying
That the *shkja* and the Albanian
Could ne'er live on earth together,
That whene'er they chanced to meet they'd

Kill and slaughter one another?
What's that echo in the mountains,
What's the trouble with the torrents?
Why is Mark Milani frowning?
Rrush Hasani has attacked now,
Rrushman he, the living sabre,
Round his head he twists a turban,
At his side Martini rifle,
In his belt he plies his pistols,
On his feet are ragged sandals.
Angrily his teeth he clenches,
Snorts and fumes like a *kulshedra,*
Steaming, striding in the marshes.
He has snarled out at the *çetas*,
Chafed at Montenegro's *çetas,*
Looked like he'd devour them living.
Praise be to the Lord Almighty,
How his mouth did foam in fury,
How the gall rose to his eyelids,
When he set forth, *shkjas* assaulting.
Neither stones nor cliffs could stop him,
As he sprang from ledge to ledge while
Killing fighters in the carnage.
Drenched in blood, the hero raged
And battled with the *shkjas* around him,
Stabbing some and hacking heads off.
Had you seen him and been witness,
You'd have truly shuddered, brother.
What a state the *shkjas* were in now.
From behind they tried assaulting,
Brandishing in hand their sabres,
None of them yet dared to near him
Or to strike him with their steel swords,
For when Rrush stood there before them
With the shadow of a giant,
Did the *shkjas* take fright and harry
Like the swifts do in the mountains,
Darting at some mountain eagle,
Diving back and forth behind it,
Nipping, prodding at the bird but
Never getting too close to it.
Should the eagle then attack one,

All the swifts veer off and scurry,
Soaring in the air, they scatter
Like the chaff does after threshing.
Look, oh Lord, at Rrush advancing,
How he rustles up his forces,
How the earth around him trembles
As he wades into the *shkjas* there,
As he hews their heads off, lobbing
Them onto the ground like melons,
Causing grief to Mark Milani.
Mark Milani, handsome hero,
On the other slope was sitting.
When he saw the sons of mothers
Being slaughtered on the war grounds,
Did he raise a cry and holler:
"Has no mother raised a son who,
Like the sons of old, is made of
Rifle powder and saltpetre,
Someone who could launch his sabre,
At that terrible *kulshedra*
Which has ravaged my poor soldiers,
Slaying some and slicing others,
Strips of meat hung on a meat hook?
By the arms my father left me,
On his brow I'd place a medal,
Make him in-law or *kumara*,
I'd bestow on him two pistols,
Pistols fashioned down in Shkodra,
With them he'd kill from a distance,
No need more for his *zdragusha,*
Handmade weapons tooled by Tusha,
They twelve purses full in value,
All in gold the handles gilded."
Thus spoke Mark Milani and a
Fellow from Rahova heard him,
Milo Spasi, *zana*-hearted,
Heeded him and set out headlong,
'cross the fields and through the oak woods,
Like a wild boar butting forwards,
Slashing passers-by to pieces,
Ripping with its tusks protruding
From the snout as it advances.

Under him the earth did tremble,
Sabre in his hand a-flashing
As he sped and ran towards Rrushman.
Mark Milani was delighted,
Dash Galani rose to meet him,
How he rose to his encounter,
Twirling, brandishing his sabre,
As he loped towards Milo Spasi,
Like a she-wolf in Bishkazi.
Had he not been so aggressive,
Would the *shkja* have chopped his head off,
On the ground his skull would roll and
Make of his young bride a widow,
Who would mourn him and lament him
Like the cuckoos in the thickets.
The *shkja* was a young *drangue* fighter,
Suckled by a great *kulshedra*,
Yes, the *shkja* was a real *drangue*,
Headless did he render people,
Left them lying in the bushes
When they came to his encounter.
But the hero was not worried
That he'd bludgeoned all the people,
Withered hearts of all the mothers,
And to leave he was determined
Not before he'd met with Rrushman,
Met with that Rrushman Hasani,
Met and fought him on the war grounds,
On his chest receive the medal,
Put the pistols in his belt as
Mark, the ruddy captain, promised,
Pledged upon his word of honour,
Could he but chop Rrush's head off.
Then came forth Kolë Cuja with his
Whiskers like grain sheaves a-hanging,
Loping forwards like a greyhound
Through the torrent's sand and gravel,
Arrow-straight at Milo Spasi,
There to fell him and to slay him,
Take revenge for his dead comrades.
But the will of God was different,
For the *shkja,* when he espied him

Through the torrent slogging swiftly,
Seized a boulder and did hoist it,
Howled like wolves on Mount Parûni,
Hurled it, hit him in the kneecap,
And his leg he almost fractured.
Kolë screamed loudly as he could, while
On the earth he lay there sprawling,
Clasped his hands around his kneecaps,
Moaned and sought out his companions,
For on earth in such dire straits he'd
Never been in all his lifetime,
Ne'er in such a situation.
Then Hasani heard him shouting,
Heard his voice and recognized it.
Setting off to his assistance,
Did he rush forth like a Cyclops,
Spinning rocks in all directions,
As assaulted he the *shkja* there.
As a hound which, when unchained, with
Fur upon its mane a-bristling,
Flies at others like an arrow,
To attack with fury, biting,
Driving them from paths and ditches,
Howls and whines until the other
Dogs flee back across the creek bed,
Tails between their legs in terror,
Thus the *shkjas* across the war grounds
Fled and to the plains descended,
Shunned Rrushman Hasani's war cry,
There attacking Milo Spasi
Like the *kulshedra* of Lake Shasi,
Like the bolts o'er Mount Bishkazi.
Awe was struck in Milo Spasi
When he saw Rrushman approaching,
How his lips went pale, were foaming,
Yes, his feet unmoved, he stood there,
To one side he rolled his robes up,
In his hand he held his sabre,
Steadfast was the hero waiting,
Like the wild boar when it's hunted,
Driven by the rapid greyhounds,
Up and down the slopes and clearings,

Seeing that there's no escaping
From the beasts, no woods to hide in,
Nowhere more a peak or pass, with
Bloodshot eyes and snout uplifted,
Snorting, fuming there in fury,
Does it make a stand and lurk there,
Wait there for the foe's approach and
Scuffle with them in a final
Battle as it lashes at them,
There to win the day or perish.
Look, there's Bec Patani nearing,
Broad his brow, as wide as war grounds,
Eyebrows black as raven feathers,
Eyes that flash like rifle powder,
Strike like lightning in the heavens.
Upwards did he wind his whiskers,
Body rising like a ramrod,
Fingers straight as a gun barrel,
Dressed, and girded were his weapons,
Wily hero, born a *drangue*
Set to vanquish a *kulshedra*.
Host to strangers, friend to comrades,
Always did he keep his promise,
God bestowed on him these features,
Like of ancient times a hero,
Proud son of George Castriota.
He caught sight of Milo Spasi,
Coming on that slope towards them
To attack the Highland fighters,
Brandishing in hand his sabre,
But like during sleet and snowstorms,
He could hardly recognize him,
Only saw a *shkja* was nearing.
In pursuit of him, the fighter
Followed over trails and boulders,
'til he reached that riverbed where
Mil, the living sword, was waiting,
In his hand a sabre hoisted,
There to fight Rrushman Hasani,
Stood there stiffly, face grew pallid,
Steeled and poised for lethal combat.
Bec then peered and recognized him,

Held his pace all of a sudden -
They had been friends and *kumaras*
Having drunk each other's blood two
Years before in Montenegro,
When both Bec and Çul had taken
Refuge with him to escape the
Sultan's wrath, who'd put much money
On their heads so he could seize them,
Snatch and thrash them dead or living,
For that wretched Turkish major
Whom they'd badly treated down in
Lezha... and the fellow perished.
Bec and Çul, two lads of Shkreli,
Sultan's foes they from Bzheta,
Never ceased to be a nuisance,
Cutting wires and blocking highways,
Chasing, killing Turkish soldiers,
Quarrelling with Turkish horsemen,
Making fun of tenant farmers.
Everywhere they went, these sly lads
Left no stone upon another.
Thus the sultan did give orders
For their capture, dead or living.
And in Shkodra, Vali Pasha
Went and summoned Ali Qorri,
Ali Qorri, Turkish major.
Eyebrows frowning on his forehead,
Did the pasha speak in anger:
"Listen to me, sultan's major,
May you be no pious Muslim,
May you Ramadan ne'er keep and
May you never feast at Bayram,
May the sultan's food now choke you,
'less you bring me by tomorrow,
By tomorrow sunset latest,
To my office, dead or living,
Those two sly sons of Patani
Who are causing grief at Lezha's
Mausoleum, Shkodra's castle."
To his feet rose Ali Qorri,
Put his garments and his belt on,
Readied, saddled up his bay horse,

Sprang onto the steed and, mounted,
Headed down the road for Lezha.
Off to Lezha did he gallop,
Guards three hundred right behind him.
When they reached the mosque at Lezha,
Ali Qorri was in fury,
On its hind legs reared the bay horse,
Putting sparks upon the pavement,
And the *kajmekam* did wonder
Why the guards were all around him,
Wondered, sent his men to ask him:
"Where, oh major, are you off to?"
"To the Drin, the yonder bank there,
To the Drin, the ford of Lezha."
Loudly were the trumpets sounded,
Echoed on Marleka hillside,
And the lower slopes resounded.
Like a storm from off the ocean,
Cannons roared from Antivari,
Fired at those sons of Patani.
Then outdoors did come Bec's mother,
Stood and clasped her hands together,
To Saint Anthony and God, prayed:
"Come out, sons, we've been surrounded."
Then Patani's lads emerged, the
Two of them like mountain bears, and
Look! They fired at Ali Qorri,
Shot him in his chest, two bullets,
Flung him sprawling in the courtyard.
Midst the firing of the army
Did they scramble down the hillside,
'til they reached the ford of Belaj
'til they crossed the Buna river,
Took flight into Montenegro,
To the house of Milo Spasi,
To his house, and he received them,
Gave them bread and salt as custom,
Just as if they were his brothers.
A good man's never stingy when it
Comes to rifles, food and promise.
"Do my eyes deceive me, brother?
Are you really Milo Spasi?

Never would I have imagined
That I'd meet you in this place here
Where we're fighting one another
Like the wild beasts in the thickets,"
Bec Patani stood there asking.
"Yes, it's me, Bec, that you see, I'm
Milo Spasi, your blood brother,"
Saying, did the fighter sheathe his
Sabre which with blood was dripping.
Bec approached him, they embraced
With head to head in Highland manner.
"How are you and how've you been there?
How the herds and how your household?"
Bec inquired kindly, saying.
"All alive and well, consid'ring,"
Milo then to him responded,
Grown to one his bushy eyebrows.
"What good fortune that I find you
Here before me now, for ages
Have I yearned for you as were you,
Yes, three hundred times my brother!"
Has it ever happened that you've
Seen a hound when it's unchained, and
Lunges at a guest approaching
Soon as it espies him and would
Almost tear him into pieces?
Should the owner now, however,
Come out first as host, *kumara,*
Take him home and make him welcome,
Will its rage and anger vanish,
Will its frenzied circling cease and
Slightly with its tail a-wagging,
Will it slowly near the guest and
Take a sniff or two around him.
Soon the hound will lead them home as
If it were a little puppy.
Thus, Rrushman Hasani acted
When he saw him, Bec Patani,
Cheek to cheek with Milo Spasi,
As prescribes the Highland *Kanun.*
In his tracks did stop the fighter,
Stop there with his whiskers drooping,

Curving, curling down before him,
Right down to his belt cascading,
O'er his shoulder was his *huta*,
Blood was flowing down his arms and
Fire was in his ox eyes blazing.
In its sheath he placed his sabre,
Then the fighter came advancing,
Shook the hand of Milo Spasi,
"How are you?" he asked of Milo
In amazement, "Hope you've been well."
"How've you been yourself?" the *shkja* asked
Hesitating and embarrassed.
Bec then spoke up: "Listen, Rrushi,
This man here is my blood brother,
Milo Spasi from Rahova,
Who is skilled at war and speaking,
Many Turks and Moors he's slaughtered,
Pared them all like cukes and pumpkins.
All who go to Montenegro,
Slavs, Albanians, be they Christians,
He has helped them, lent assistance,
Proffered bread and salt, protection.
Çul and I, when we in Lezha
Shot and killed that Ali Qorri,
Making foe thus of the sultan,
Fled and made for Montenegro,
Went and were received in honour,
Full three years did we sojourn with
Bread and meat, with wine and raki."
What said then Rrushman Hasani?
"Well, indeed, oh Bec Patani,
What a fine friend you've encountered!
For it is the way you mentioned."
Deeply moved was now the fighter,
Brandishing his savage sabre,
Cannon balls and bullets flying,
"To your words will I add nothing,"
Replied Milo Spasi to them,
"Even pumpkins floating downwards
In the river carried by the
Water's current, will at some point
Meet their end, be snared and captured,

Smashed against the roots and boulders."
From the pocket in his mantle
Rrushi pulled out his tobacco,
Rolled for each a cigarette which
Bec then lit up with a flintstone.
Rrushi said to Milo Spasi:
"God has given me a son who's
Three years old at home and growing.
Should it be the will of God and
Should our heads stay on our shoulders
In the midst of all this clamour,
I would have you come to Shkreli,
Come and cut his hair the first time,
I would have you be *kumara*."
"That is just what I was thinking,"
Said the fellow from Rahova,
Wresting from his belt a pistol,
Pistol made in Montenegro,
With five bullets, nowhere is a
Rifle stronger; and to Rrushman
Did he pass it with the barrel.
Rrushi with a pipe of silver
Ornamented did requite it,
With an oval piece of amber,
Finely wrought with serpent motif
Winding all along it, tooled by
Tuke Jakova, famous goldsmith,
Worth a purse, five hundred pieces.
Then he turned to Bec, commanding:
"Listen, take your friend now with you,
Take him down beyond our trenches,
He'll be safe there. Farewell to you!"
Then the fellows separated,
Bec and Milo to Sutjeska,
Rrushman moved off up the meadows,
Eyes a-glowing like hot embers.
What's that howling in the mountains?
Rrustem Uka, handsome youth he,
At the Grapevine Pass was Rrustem
With three hundred shepherd fighters,
Ready for the Montenegrins,
Not to let them grab Gucia.

Then a rumour spread that fame was
For the taking in Sutjeska,
While the mortars, cannons boomed there,
Mark Milani was besieging
With his Montenegrin forces,
Waves of blood flowed to their kneecaps.
To his feet rose Rrustem Uka,
To Sutjeska did he hasten
With three hundred mountain falcons
Just before the sun was setting.
When he reached that mountain ridge did
Rrustem Uka shout out loudly,
Made the hills and mountains echo:
"Hold on, Highlands, we are bringing
Fifteen-score Martini rifles."
Then the fighters entered battle,
As when hail beats o'er the vineyards,
Held aloft their savage sabres,
In their hands their smoking *hutas*,
So entangled were the fighters,
Many heads did go to seed there,
On that slope fell many fellows,
Some lost ears, and limbs the others,
Blood streamed down the hills in torrents,
How their eyes were filled with gun smoke,
They could only seek God's mercy.
In the midst was shouting, screaming,
Squealing, bawling, shrieking, brawling,
As they set on one another,
Mortars firing, cannons booming,
Hutas and *shejshanas* roared like
Landslides on Mount Haramia,
Vizitor and Metohija.
Sunset came as God had willed it,
And at once ceased all the fighting,
Into two the sides divided,
Weary, as the moon was rising.

Canto 21

MEDIATION

After a lengthy description of the aftermath of the battle - blood, severed limbs and heads - Father Gjon from Canto XIX appears. He asks the pasha for permission to visit Mark Milani to arrange a truce in order to bury the dead. The pasha agrees. Accompanied only by an altar boy, Father Gjon heads out for the camp of the Montenegrin commander. There he is received with honour. A long dialogue between the patriotic Father Gjon and the magnanimous Mark Milani ensues, and the truce is arranged. Some of the warriors will not honour it though, and champ at the bit for more action. Taking twenty of his faithful companions with him, Bec Patani sets out on a sheep raid into Montenegro in retaliation. They attack a farm at night and drive the flock home. The scene is again reminiscent of the Iliad, the nocturnal foray of Odysseus and Diomedes into the Trojan camp. On their way back, they hear of Mark Milani's plans for a new attack when the truce ends, this time at Nokshiq. They hurry to report this news to Ali Pasha.

Moon, oh moon, now be my witness,
You who always since creation
Planet earth have circled, ever
Wandering, roaming through the heavens.
'twas God's finger which did show you
Your place in the vault of heaven,
When your brow with rays he fretted,
You're my witness, can you tell me
If you've ever seen such sorrow,
Seen such carnage in the cosmos,
As tonight you've here beheld and
Witnessed now in poor Sutjeska?
Slopes and meadows bathed in blood here,
Fighters felled, mowed down and harrowed,
Some have perished, some were injured,
Mutilated, amputated,
Agonizing and in mourning,
On the black earth piled their bodies,
Not a stone to serve as pillow.
Legs and necks stiff, members crippled,
Some lost limbs, and heads were missing,

Lying on their backs or bellies,
O'er the meadows were they scattered,
Arms and legs limp from the beating,
Bodies bent and hunched there crumpled.
Like a penned and fattened ox when
Butchers' knives are plunged into it,
Back and forth the beast will bristle,
Struggle in its final hour,
'til at last its soul's remitted.
Praise be to you, God Almighty,
What a scene there, horrifying,
Soaked in blood a man from Vuthaj
On a *shkja* corpse splayed he lay there,
In his teeth an ear he'd torn off.
Also on a Slavic fighter,
Lad from Njegush in his garments,
With a whiskered man from Plava,
Whom he to the death had duelled,
Giving up the ghost, they fought on,
Faces ravaged, noses gnawed off,
Streams of blood bathed both the bodies,
Like wild boars with tusks dissecting,
Like two serpents in the brambles,
Lay they biting one another.
They were born in ancient hatred,
Even if a fearsome death should
Launch them ever into limbo,
They would not give up the ghost if
They did not choke one another,
Choke and squeeze that final breath out.
Many mothers will be mourning,
Many sisters will be sighing,
Will be sighing for their brothers,
Brides, too, will be garbed as widows
In Albania and Montenegro,
For that war ground had no bushes,
Had no cliffs, no place to hide those
Injured fighters, had no room for
Ravaged bodies, wilted warriors
To lie silent midst the carnage.
Nor through all the corpses could you
Move, advancing down the hillside,

Through those fighters, perished, who will
Ne'er more cast on earth a shadow.
Piles of dead *shkjas* and Albanians
E'er despising one another,
Death of them has now made brothers.
Heads removed and mutilated,
Bodies side by side there lying,
Like charred tree stumps in a clearing,
And the skulls strewn in the valleys,
Rolling, tumbling down the hillsides,
End, amassed there in the meadows,
Just as ducks in ponds will gather.
In amongst the brittle branches
Scattered are felt caps, *kapicas*,
Mixed up *hutas* and *novicas*,
Sown with sabres were the oak groves,
Flintlock pistols and *shejshanas,*
Round about lay belts and ramrods,
Cloaks and garments, thongs and sandals,
Even moccasins of leather,
Bread bags, saddlebags and pouches,
Jugs there were, and empty bottles,
Flutes and fifes and shepherds' reed pipes,
All forlorn among the tree stumps,
Cast about with drums and trumpets,
Cannons sinking in the trenches,
Clouds of smoke like fog around them,
Girders, tiles and crossbeams fallen,
Walls of houses caved and crumbled.
There the she-wolf stood a-howling,
Whining, mewling in the ruins,
Moaned the fate of poor Sutjeska
Which had changed to char and ashes,
Mice within the walls wept for it,
Serpents under stones took pity!
What is Father Gjon now doing?
To the pasha did he hasten,
Spoke and told him what had happened,
Bayraktars and elders listened.
"Nothing worse could e'er befall us,
All the victims lie unburied,
Slavs sleep slain beside Albanians,

Fodder for the wolves and martens,
Sustenance for ravens, falcons.
On the ground we hear survivors,
Moaning, groaning, badly injured.
Some have perished, maimed are others,
That your hearts would weep, lamenting,
None can render them assistance.
Border guards have been deployed there,
Letting no one cross the boundary.
These men are no common robbers
Who have fallen in the bushes,
Side by side with snakes and vipers,
Out committing deeds unworthy,
Out for thieving and for violence.
These are fighters who as heroes
Fell in battle 'mongst their comrades,
Shoulder to shoulder did they perish,
Some like wolves and others lions,
In the fields and in the shadows,
Sacrificed their lives undaunted,
Carried out the given orders.
Thus it is by no means proper,
Both before Our Lord a sin and
To mankind a shame if we now
Leave the corpses on the war grounds,
Whether they be *shkja* or Albanian,
Nor can we neglect the injured
Unassisted, wounds untended.
Therefore have I now decided,
If my plan finds your approval,
Concords with Albanian customs,
I will go to Mark Milani,
And arrange with him a *besa*
'til tomorrow, 'til the time the
Day-star rises and does shimmer,
That the Slavs and the Albanians
Will not charge or storm each other,
But in graves their dead will bury,
Bear the injured to the trenches,
Back to their own people's trenches."
Then the pasha started speaking:
"Well, oh preacher, have you spoken,

For since ancient times have people
Sworn a *besa*, here and elsewhere,
For their dead and for their injured.
Take whom you desire with you,
Voyvodes, bayraktars or elders,
Whom you think would be most fitting.
Go and visit Mark Milani,
Tell him, should he show agreement,
That shall cease until the morrow
All the shooting and the carnage,
So that o'er the fields can venture
People without guns and daggers,
As the laws of war would have it,
To collect the dead and injured.
We agree to give our *besa*
In good faith until the day dawns."
Father Gjon said, in his waist belt:
"I'll no bayraktar or voyvode
Take with me, but just a servant,
And God's mercy, praise be to Him,
Never has He me forsaken.
Now it will become my pleasure
In between two foes to stand and
Stop the shooting, altercations.
No one thus can be against me
For I seek to bring together
Albania and Montenegro
'til the sun comes up tomorrow."
To his feet arose the Father,
Put his shoes on and got ready,
Tied a cord around his waistline,
Bound a white sheet to his staff and
Left with that young lad behind him,
Set off downwards through the thickets,
Off to meet with Mark Milani.
When he reached the Montenegrin
Camp, he called out to the watchman:
"Listen to me, Montenegrins,
Far and wide's your reputation,
We know of your wiles and courage.
Tell me, can you lead and take me
Safe and sound across the camp up

To the tent of Mark Milani?
I've been sent here by the leader,
Head of the Albanian army,
And I have an urgent message
To convey to Mark Milani."
"Put your arms down, should you have them,
Come and follow right behind me,
No one here will harm a herald,
No one here will maim or kill you,
We're not Turks, we're Montenegrins,
We have honour, keep our promise,"
Vowed the Montenegrin watchman
Bluntly, and went forth to lead him.
When they got to Mark Milani,
Mark did greet the Father warmly,
Shook his hand and bid him enter,
In the tent he served him coffee,
Opened up the conversation,
Asked politely if the Latin
Father was indeed Albanian,
Where he came from and was going,
And what message he was bearing.
Kindly did the Father answer:
"I'm not Latin, but Albanian,
I'm a Catholic monk, just like the
Eastern monks of your persuasion,
Father Gjon is what they call me,
Always busy with religion.
But this time, I've come to see and
Beg you on behalf of man and
In the name of God Almighty
For an act of kindness, mercy.
Fields and meadows, ridges, hills are
All with dead and injured covered,
No one ventures out to get them,
That in graves the dead be buried,
Borne the injured to the trenches.
Border guards have been deployed there,
Letting no one cross the boundary.
Thus Slav and Albanian fighters
Have remained, alas, unburied.
Fodder for the wolves and martens,

Food for eagles, kites and buzzards.
Long life to you, will you do it,
Swear a *besa* with Albanians,
In good faith an ancient *besa*
'til tomorrow, 'til the time the
Day-star rises and does shimmer,
That the Slavs and the Albanians
Will not charge or storm each other,
So that o'er the fields may venture
People without guns and daggers,
As the law has e'er decreed it,
To collect the dead and injured,
In their graves the slain to bury,
And to care for the tormented,
Giving food and herbal treatment?
I've a promise from the leader,
Head of the Albanian army,
That he'll truly keep the *besa*
'til the sun does rise tomorrow.
What, my Lord, will you now answer?"
"God be praised, oh blessed father,
That you've taken on this business,"
Mark responded to him kindly:
"I can give you, too, my *besa*
In good faith with no deception,
But I have a question for you,
If you do not mind my asking:
Tell me, how can you explain it:
Both of us are really Christians,
Cross in hand and cross on forehead,
Yet you give the Turks assistance?
Are you better off as servants
To the Turks who've been so cruel,
Who assault you and besmirch you,
Who forever steal your cattle?
Why not join us in alliance,
Customs, language, faith preserving,
Recognizing Prince Nikolla,
Noble hero, as your leader,
Who himself is part Albanian?"
Patiently replied the Father,
As is for a priest befitting:

"May your life be long, commander,
We do not have time, I fear,
To enter into such discussions,
For the night is swift approaching,
On the hillsides injured lie and
Languish there, of thirst are dying.
Don't repeat that accusation,
Not to me or to the others,
That I'm in the Turkish army
Fighting against Montenegro,
For it's not true, that assertion.
Yes, my Lord, I've joined the army,
Not as Turk but as Albanian.
Both the Muslims and the Christians,
Christians, Muslims all together,
Have but one land, their Albania.
Therefore we will all defend it,
All protect it and do battle,
All together torn to pieces,
Latins, Orthodox and Muslims,
For Albania, yes, we'll struggle.
You brought out no guns and cannons
To convert the Turks from Islam,
But to conquer poor Albania
Down at least to where the Drin flows.
May your life be long, so be it,
I'm a priest, but I'll with Muslims
Sacrifice myself, I tell you.
Let them chain me, let them hang me,
But I'll not give up Albania,
Not a big piece or a little,
Without seeing Montenegro
Bathed in blood for every handbreadth.
Where does it say in the Gospels
That an Albanian Father, seeing
Some Mark tread upon Albania,
Press his knee against her gut, should
Be a gun without a trigger,
Scarecrow in a field of melons,
Should be left without a sabre,
Be unfit to walk the war grounds,
Like an owl up in the oak trees,

Like a pot from fence post hanging?
Let it not be said a Father
Tarried ever with the Turks
Especially when he with his fellows
Fought and strove for his fair country,
Hand on rifle, soul in fervour.
No indeed, sir, mind your speech now,
For it's not true, that assertion.
Now concerning your suggestion,
That we bow to Prince Nikolla,
Whom you say's a noble hero,
Let me tell you something, will you?
For the way I understand it,
If I'm not completely crazy,
Doom's awaiting Montenegro.
Listen closely to my words now,
For the time will come, your lordship,
When Albania'll rise and flourish,
Of itself will be the master.
Do excuse me if I tell you
Montenegro will soon vanish,
Swallowed by its Serbian brother,
Swallowed without right or reason.
On your head a Serbian eagle,
One day you'll be without vision,
When it gouges both your eyes out.
That's the way the cookie crumbles,
Mountains fall and hillocks rise, but
There's a saying in the Balkans:
'Words alone can't kill or wed you'."
So proclaimed the priest and rose up.
Mark Milani, *drangue* hero,
Being noble, of good bearing,
Turned and shook his hand politely,
Wished him well on his departure.
To the guards he gave the order,
Word then spread back on the war grounds,
People came out to the fields to
Bury those who there had fallen,
Bear away on biers the injured,
Both sides there, Slavs and Albanians,
Carried loved ones back to campsites.

Father Gjon climbed up the hill with
Nika Gjoni of Kastrati,
Known and famed as a physician,
Much sought after in the Highlands.
Father Gjon, while flock anointing,
Heard confessions, Nika Gjoni
Operated, saved the injured,
Rescued Christians, rescued Muslims,
Cleansing wounds and spreading ointments.
Not a day for diagnoses,
First aid's all that he had time for.
Father Gjon continued blessing,
Dead and living, both absolving,
Nika cared for all the injured,
Wielding words of consolation.
Then the army sat for dinner,
Row on row and troop by troop
According to their tribes assembled,
At their head the bayraktars and
Then the elders and the stewards,
Then the young men and the people,
As the Highland laws would have it.
Out came bottles full of raki
Passed from one hand to the other,
Out came bread and out came cabbage,
Roasts of meat and fat blood sausage,
Pork for Christians, thick a handbreadth,
Garlic, cheese and tarts of onions,
Out of bags and out of rucksacks,
Handed to them by their households.
And they hunkered down to dinner,
There discussing and conversing
All about the dead and wounded,
Everything that day they'd witnessed
While they with the *shkjas* were grappling,
Like the wild boars and the she-bears,
Making plains and mountains shudder.
When the fighters finished dinner,
Finished drinking, did they rise and
Dig more shelters, deeper trenches
All along the slopes and hillsides,
Hollowing holes and dredging ditches,

Felling trees and fencing pathways.
Well themselves the fighters readied
For the morrow's battle when the
Day-star would come out and shimmer.
Bec Patani, agile falcon,
Took aside some twenty comrades,
Twenty comrades, iron-biting,
Voices, guns and eyes like lightning,
Wild beasts chasing couldn't catch them,
Saying to them: "Since our birth we've
Never thrust in earth a pickaxe,
Blocked off paths or dug out ditches,
Planted any trees or vineyards.
We've been useless to our families,
Simply fighting Turks and *shkjas*, and
Always in the thick of battle,
Everywhere our trails did take us.
I feel if we dig these trenches
On the jagged mountain hillsides,
Hidden from the Montenegrins,
Will the Highlands seem in peril,
With the Lekas buried living.
I have therefore now decided,
With you, twenty fellows gathered,
That we'll leave for Montenegro,
Seize some booty, loot some livestock:
Cows and oxen, sheep and goat herds,
Lugging lambs and kids back with us,
Everything that our path crosses,
Stale bread's not enough to live on.
Should the war continue, lasting
Even one or two days longer,
None, I fear, will find us living.
Even if the Montenegrins
Don't attack our shelters, trenches,
Which we've hewn here in the hillsides,
Midst the mountain tracks and ditches,
We'll be forced to flee our posts for
No one's left to come and feed us,
None will bring us food and fodder,
Unlike Montenegro's army.
When the troops from Montenegro

To a man rose up, departed,
They left no one home behind them
But the aged and slow learners.
I can find my way around there,
I once lived in Montenegro
When I fell foul of the sultan.
We're enough for such a venture."
"Yes, by God, you're right, so lead us
Bec, without delaying further,
We'll not dally empty-handed,"
Thus responded Zhukë Isufi,
Eyes aflame and stake-like whiskers.
On their way the fighters hastened
Like the wolves on Mount Parûni.
Slopes and hills they left behind them,
Flew o'er fields and down the valleys,
Through the beech groves where the mountain
Hawks have nests up on the cliff sides,
Through the firs and beech and pine trees,
O'er the meadows of Sutjeska,
Crossed the lofty mountain pastures,
Onwards down the jagged canyons,
'til they got to Montenegro,
Where an alpine path awaited,
Mountain link down to the lowlands.
In the lowlands was a village,
Just a village like the others,
Houses, huts with sheds and goat pens,
Haystacks, wagons, sheep folds, silage,
At the end were found some meadows,
On the meadows stood a manor,
Hewn in stone a two-floored tower,
And the wide front was twelve paces,
With a porch and with a stable,
On the porch there was a bedstead,
That is where did sleep the master,
Guarding household and his livestock.
Right before it lay a cornfield
With a wicker fence around it.
Sheep three hundred holding in it,
Black sheep hailing from Peshteri,
Mountain goats one hundred added,

And the rams weighed thirty *okas*,
Milk one hundred *okas* daily,
Grain one hundred weights per year there.
Bec this house had chosen when he
Came to Montenegro, and with
His companions cast his gaze out
On the Slavic village nestled
At the edge of plains and flat land
In the shade of lofty mountains.
There the fighters took position
And began to talk, exchanging
Words with one another, planning
How to seize it and surround it,
Who would lurk and who'd approach it,
Where to bear away the booty,
Which the paths to use escaping,
Should the fighters need to choose them.
Butting out their cigarettes, they
Got down on all fours a-crawling,
Through the thickets, round the boulders,
Holding bayoneted rifles.
As they crept on towards the sheep fold,
Ever slowly and with care as
If on eggs they were a-treading,
Almost counting every movement,
Did the hounds all start to bark, at
First the puppies then the big ones,
Running up and down the meadow,
Foremost lay a spotted hound, chained
To a stake, guarding the gateway,
It heard humans coming at it.
With its mane on end a-standing,
Did it start to howl in fury,
Did it leap and spring, attacking
As will dogs at night with strangers.
Like a candle straight on hind legs,
Did it bite the stake in fury,
At its feet did gnash the shackles,
Then it lay low, creeping, rolling,
Lunging out and then withdrawing,
But the collar it was wearing
Round its neck was forged of iron,

It was not made for escaping,
For its foe the dog'd have shredded.
Let us see what Bec Patani
Did when he got to the sheep fold.
There he crouched behind some thistles,
In his teeth he seized his cap and
Held it firmly, facing upwards,
With a match on fire he set it,
To the spotted hound he grimaced.
When the poor dog saw him crouching,
Did it in its house take refuge,
Cowered in one corner hiding,
And did cease at once its barking.
Bec approached then with Stakë Breci,
Tiptoed up the porch so slowly,
Where they heard upon the bedstead,
On a cowhide under covers,
That a *shkja* was sleeping, snoring,
Old man he, long as a dugout,
With his eyebrows downwards drooping,
With a nose all pocked and wrinkled,
'neath his head his gun and pistol,
On a bedpost hung the bullets,
Mouldy teeth of a *kulshedra*.
Like two greyhounds at a roebuck
When a rifle bullet's felled it
And its blood flows in two torrents,
Thus did Bec and Stak make ready
To assault the poor *shkja* lying
On his bedstead, ever snoring,
Never dreaming what could happen.
As the poor *shkja* lay there sleeping,
Bec approached and seized his weapons,
Casting them into the bushes.
Then the old man woke, was startled,
And a shout he would have given,
But Stakë Breci stood there waiting,
Stuffed a kerchief in his mouth and
Thus prevented him from screaming.
Then they seized the poor old fellow,
Tied his hands behind his back up,
Prodding with Martini rifles,

As they led him to the sheep pen,
Which he opened. With a whistle
Did they call their comrades thither,
Took the bells off ram and wether,
Led the sheep and goats out with them,
Into two herds did they split them
And they set off for Sutjeska,
Over mountain pastures climbing,
Plied the pine and beechwood forests,
Trail by trail they drove and grazed them
Through the thickets like the wolf packs
When the pangs of hunger goad them.
Trembling, trudged the *shkja* behind them,
His mouth gagged, with hands tied tightly,
'til they finally reached the edge of
Montenegro and Albania.
When they crossed into Albania,
Taking with them both the sheep herds
Deep into the mountain forests,
Where they feared no *shkja* reprisal,
Bec Patani, eyes a-twinkling,
Told the old man: "Sorry, uncle,
If we've bothered you this evening,
Herds removing from your sheep fold,
You are not our foe a-feuding,
You have not our guests dishonoured,
Stolen water, shifted landmarks,
But were born a Slavic scion,
Cast your shadow on the planet,
Of no sin at all you're guilty.
Do not thus be angry with us,
Anyone this fate could suffer.
Everyone must take his turn, but
Please remember just one matter:
We will ne'er remain inactive
When the Prince of Montenegro,
Drunk with wine and drunk with raki,
Madman talking nonsense, raving,
Gathers cannons and his army
Set to occupy Albania,
Not just stealing sheep and goat herds,
Like the ones we've taken from you,

But to conquer all Albania,
Throw its people into serfdom.
No, by God, and praise be to Him,
Never will we reach agreement,
Unless we're reduced to maidens,
'less we're forced to wrest our hearthstones
From their places, leave our houses,
Piling thorn brush in the doorways."
Thus he spoke, untied the old man,
Let him go, and he departed.
At these words, emerged a fellow
From the bushes with a basket
On his back, axe on his shoulder,
Held no gun, in belt no dagger,
With no cap his head to cover,
Wore a vest, holes at the elbows,
Opened at the chest two buttons,
Trousers torn, on one thigh fastened,
Lacking buttonholes and braiding,
'round his calves was tied his footwear,
Torn and ragged socks and sandals,
Dirt and sweat his body covered,
Both his hands and face with scratches.
Just to look at the poor fellow'd
Make your heart drop to your belly,
Seeing all that he had suffered.
"Hey!" the Lekas hollered at him,
"I'm in your protection!" cried he,
Startled at the Lekas' shouting
And the *hutas* pointed at him,
"I am from Mirdita," said he,
"Munella-born, bayrak of Spaçi,
I've a house near Kalivaçi,
My name's Mark Nikollë Gera,
Live alone, don't burden others,
I'm *kumara* of Bec Patani,
If you've ever heard him mentioned,
He slew Ali Qorri as he
Crossed a ford without permission,
Out to capture Bec and jail him,
And today a song is sung
About his exploits with the *huta.*"

"What? You're Mark, you're my *kumara*?"
Answered thus him Bec, approaching,
Shook the hand of his *kumara*,
Pressing cheek on cheek in greeting,
As is custom 'mongst the bayraks
Of Albania, then did ask him:
"Why are you here in these bushes,
And what brought you to this region,
Caught between the *shkjas* and wolf packs?"
"'twas misfortune, oh *kumara*,
Even now, had things been different,
I'd be dwelling in Albania,
Living on my land, the home which
God and my forefathers gave me.
'twas misfortune that befell me,
With some comrades did I scuffle
And thus fled to Montenegro.
For a gentleman I worked there,
For a few years did I stay there,
For a few years thanks to God's help,
Did I not get on too badly,
Had enough food there to live on.
Then the war broke out and fighting,
And they came abruptly, seized me
And did place me under orders
To bring food unto the army.
Day and night did I supply them,
As you see me with my basket,
But this night did I escape them
Not of bother and exhaustion,
Having carried stones and boulders,
Having borne them up the valleys,
Like a hedgehog through the bushes,
But to come to you and tell you
How our fighters now are faring,
For the *shkjas* plan to surround you
Once the *besa* for the dead and
For the injured has expired.
Mark Milani's given orders
For the whole army this evening
To retreat and leave Sutjeska
And sneak o'er the mountain pastures,

To attain Nokshiq by sunrise,
In their net like fish they'll snare you.
Thus, in my opinion, you must
Rise and hustle, get a move on,
Tell what's happened to the elders,
Otherwise, I fear to tell you,
If you hesitate and doddle,
That our forces will be swallowed."
This Mark uttered, and the fighters
Turned and spoke to one another.
They decided Mark and Bec, with
Zhukë Isufi and Stakë Breci'd
Leave their friends there with the booty,
And would hasten to Sutjeska,
Foil the trick of the commander
Of the Montenegrin army,
There without delay informing
Ali Pasha and the elders.
Mark did not possess a rifle,
Unarmed in the plains and mountains,
Travel's not a good idea
'specially when a war is raging.
Stak thus gave him his *zdragusha*,
A revolver and some bullets,
Arms which from the *shkja* in slumber
Bec had stolen and discarded.
Stak had seen them in the bushes,
While his comrades were preparing
With the sheep and goats to set off,
Took both weapons and removed them,
Slung the rifle o'er his shoulder,
In his gun belt the revolver.
Mark then cast away his basket,
Struck out with the others over
Mountain pastures towards Sutjeska.
When the fighters reached Sutjeska,
They to Ali Pasha hastened,
Telling him how Mark Milani'd
Given orders for the army
In the night to march on Nokshiq,
There to trap all the Albanians,
Seal off all the trails and pathways,

And on all sides to surround them.
To his feet sprang Ali Pasha,
Summoned, mustered all the elders.
Who together did take counsel,
What to do and how to do it.
In the evening they agreed that
They would send their troops to Nokshiq,
Leaving, though, a force 'til morning
Of three hundred in Sutjeska
With Prêlë Tuli to command it,
For the darkness can be traitor.
Thus the elders had decided,
And the army moved on Nokshiq,
Filed like natives in the nighttime.

Canto 22

TRINGA

Action takes place at Nokshiq in the upper Lim valley of southeastern Montenegro. All the inhabitants and even the wild animals have fled to avoid the coming carnage. Only Tringa remains behind on the family farm, a valiant Albanian maiden tending to her dying brother Curr Ula. The self-sacrificing devotion of the fair and intrepid sister, the character of whom is borrowed from Albanian oral literature, is described by the poet in tender detail. Curr Ula dies and it is now up to Tringa to bury him on their land despite the imminent outbreak of fighting. An invading Slavic warrior, Gjur Kokoti, espies her and wants her 'as a servant for my mother,' but Tringa will have none of it. She seizes her rifle and shoots him in the chest, only to be shot in the head herself by Gjur Kokoti's companion Vasil Ndreka.

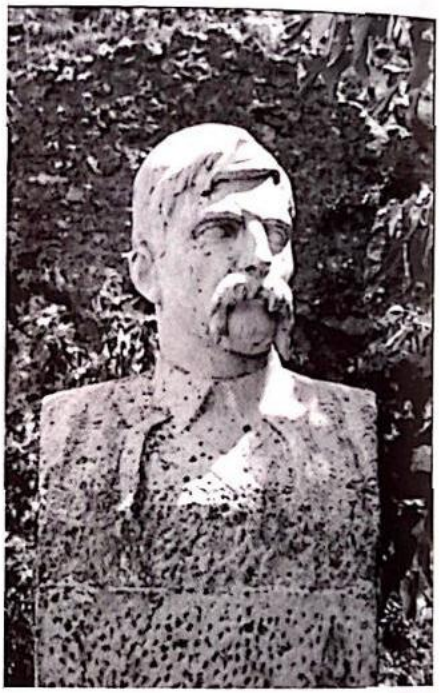
Oh great Lord, 'tis Thee we worship.
Now the light of day was dawning,
From Nokshiq leapt bolts of lightning,
Thunder roared in little Peja
Mark Milani was doing battle,
Mark Milani, Mark Milica.
Hutas and *novicas* echoed,
Firing back and forth in Nokshiq,
From Albania and Montenegro,
Both again would bathe in bloodshed!
Mark, that sly and clever fellow,
Through the night he led his army,
Led it 'til he got to Nokshiq,
Dodged the bushes like a hedgehog,
Once the *besa* had expired
Keeping peace between the troops
Until the day-star rose and shimmered.
O'er the mountains, through the canyons
He dispatched in groups his forces,
Thinking of the time thereafter,
When the *besa* would be over,
That he'd from behind Sutjeska
Charge at the Albanian army,
Without warning, as an eagle

From the heights assaults a rabbit
Sitting calmly in the brambles.
Thus he'd have them all surrounded,
The Albanians caught and captured,
In a net like minnows, gudgeons.
Once he'd seized them, Mark was planning
Not to let a single one go
Back and tell the Albanian people
What transpired in Montenegro
With their forces, when in fury
He attacked Gucia, Plava,
For the Seven Kings and sultan
All agreed that he should snare them,
Place upon them his *kapica*,
Steal their herds and their belongings.
Mark Milani's threat to seize them,
Capture the Albanians living,
Does not cause me any problem,
Stamboul's very sultan has not
Ever managed to subdue them.
How could Prince Nikolla do it?
Starving, thin now as a gun belt,
Ragged sandals, tattered jacket.
Only one thing I'm afraid of,
That with Mark down on the cliff side,
He could do Nokshiq much damage.
No one's left there to defend it
But some infants, old men, women
There to keep the herds and houses.
All the men left, one per household,
When alarm cries spread in Nokshiq
That the *shkjas* had struck Sutjeska
Which had been bestowed upon them
By the Seven Kings and sultan.
All of them sped to Sutjeska,
Men aged seven up to seventy,
Hands on weapons, souls in fervour,
Sped to save, preserve their homeland,
Which forever'd been tormented
By a planet full of envy.
Even though our army struggled,
Having set out for Sutjeska

Above: The Island of Vranina in Lake Shkodra (Photo: Elsie).

Left: The present-day fishing village of Vranina (Photo: Elsie).

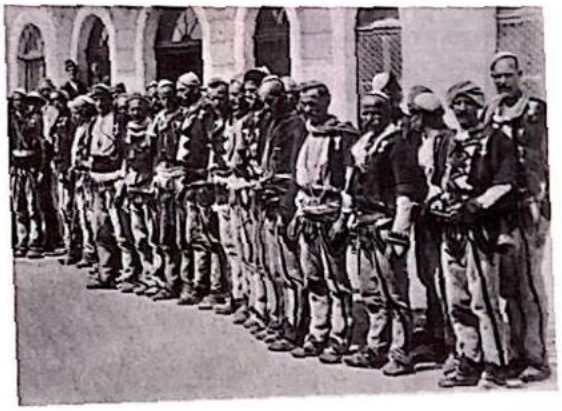
Above: Highland warrior Marash Uci (1810-1914) of Hoti, photographed between his brothers Lukë and Marash Marku (Photo: Marubi).



Top: View from Hoti tribal territory, looking down the valley towards Lake Shkodra (Photo: Elsie).

Left: Prince Nikolla of Montenegro (1841-1921).

Above: Bust of Montenegrin military leader Mark Milani/Marko Miljanov (1833-1901) (Photo: Elsie).



Top: Villagers from the Zadrima region near Shkodra (Photo: Marubi).

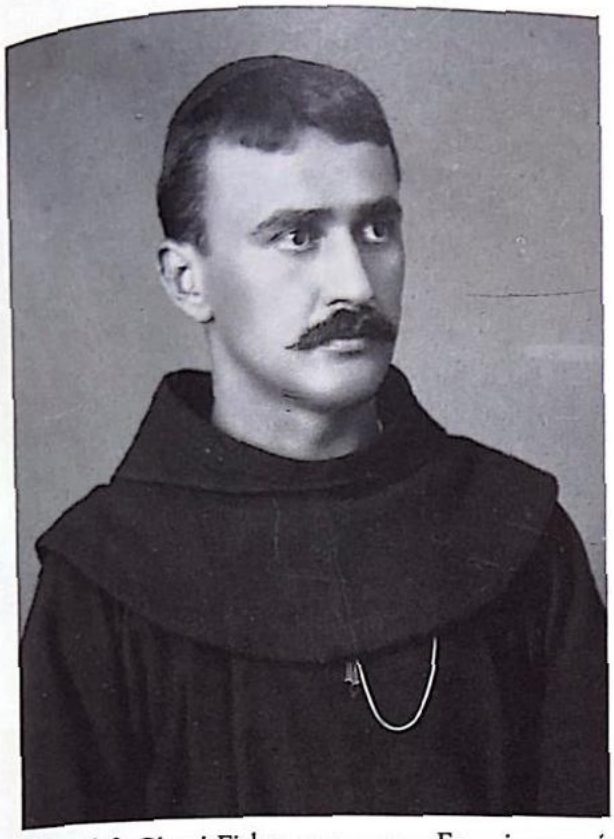
Left: Highland warrior Dedë Gjo' Luli (1840-1915) of Hoti posing with his son Kola (1888-1918) (Photo: Marubi).

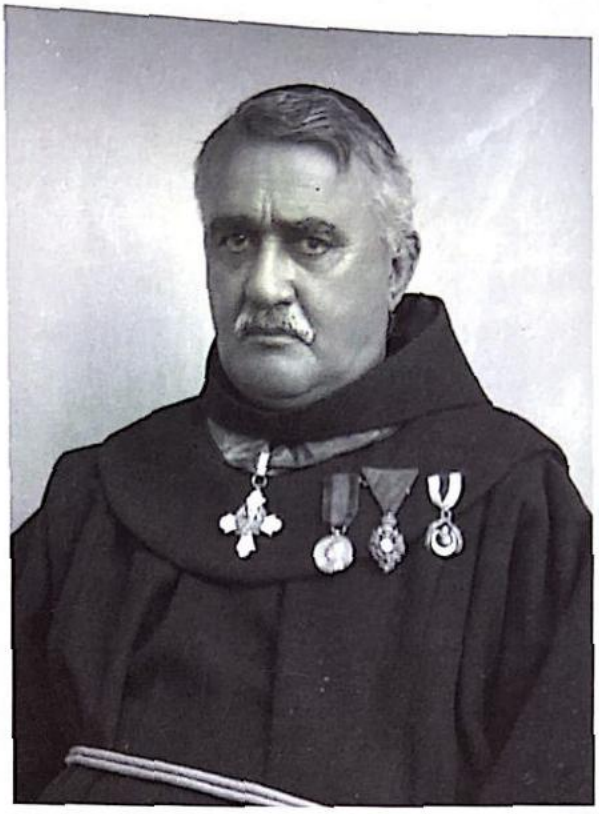
Above: Albanian Highlanders assembled in Shkodra.

Above: Highland women near Shkodra, wearing their black jubletas.

Above: Leaders of the Shoshi tribe in Dukagjini during the 1912 Uprising (Photo: Marubi).

Above: Highland woman of the Shala tribe in Dukagjini.





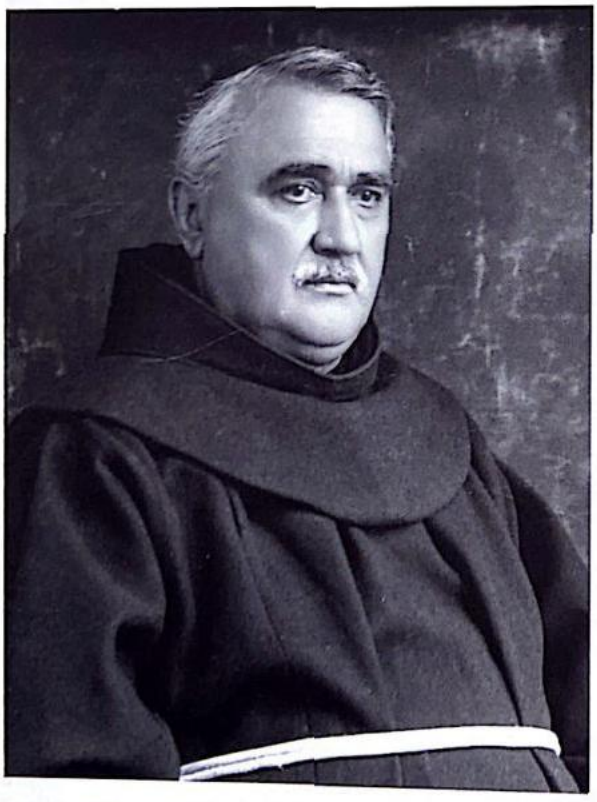
Above left: Gjergj Fishta as a young Franciscan priest (Photo: Marubi). *Above right:* Gjergj Fishta decorated by four countries: Turkey, Austria, the Vatican and Greece (Photo: Marubi).

Above: Young warriors (Djelmnia) of the Shala tribe (Photo: Marubi).

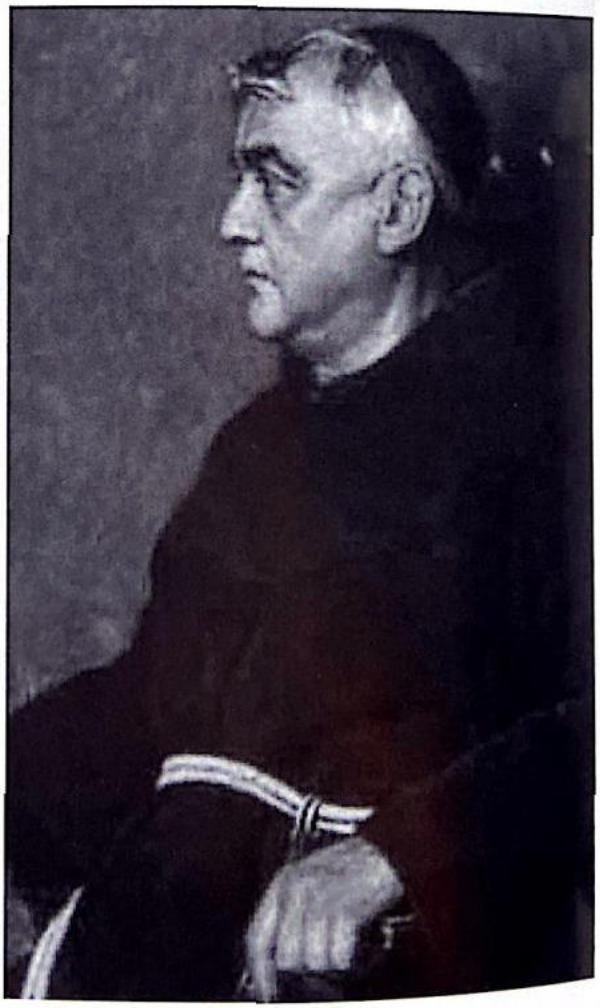
Above left: Gjergj Fishta posing with members of his family (Photo: Marubi).

Left: Mount Vizitor (2,211 m.) looming over Lake Plava in southeastern Montenegro (Photo: Elsie).

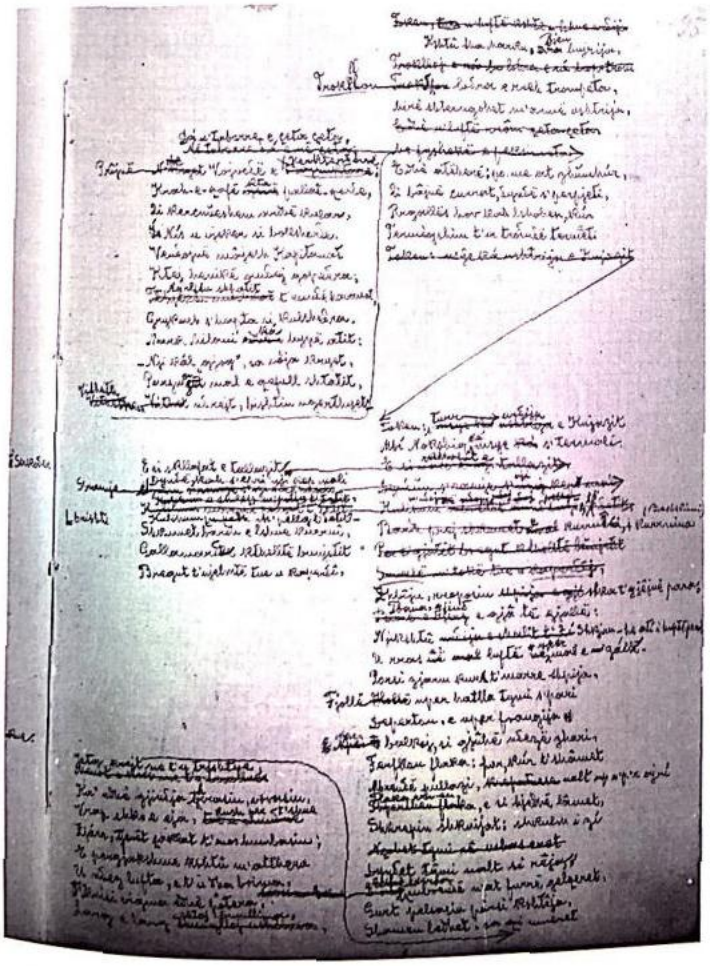
Above left: Writers Luigj Gurakuqi (l.), Gjergj Fishta (m.) and Ndre Mjeda (r.), all as members of parliament for Shkodra in 1923 (Photo: Marubi). *Above right:* The national poet excised. Photo-retouching in communist Albania. This version of the 1923 photo was published in Albania in 1982.



Above: Gjergj Fishta (Photo: Marubi).

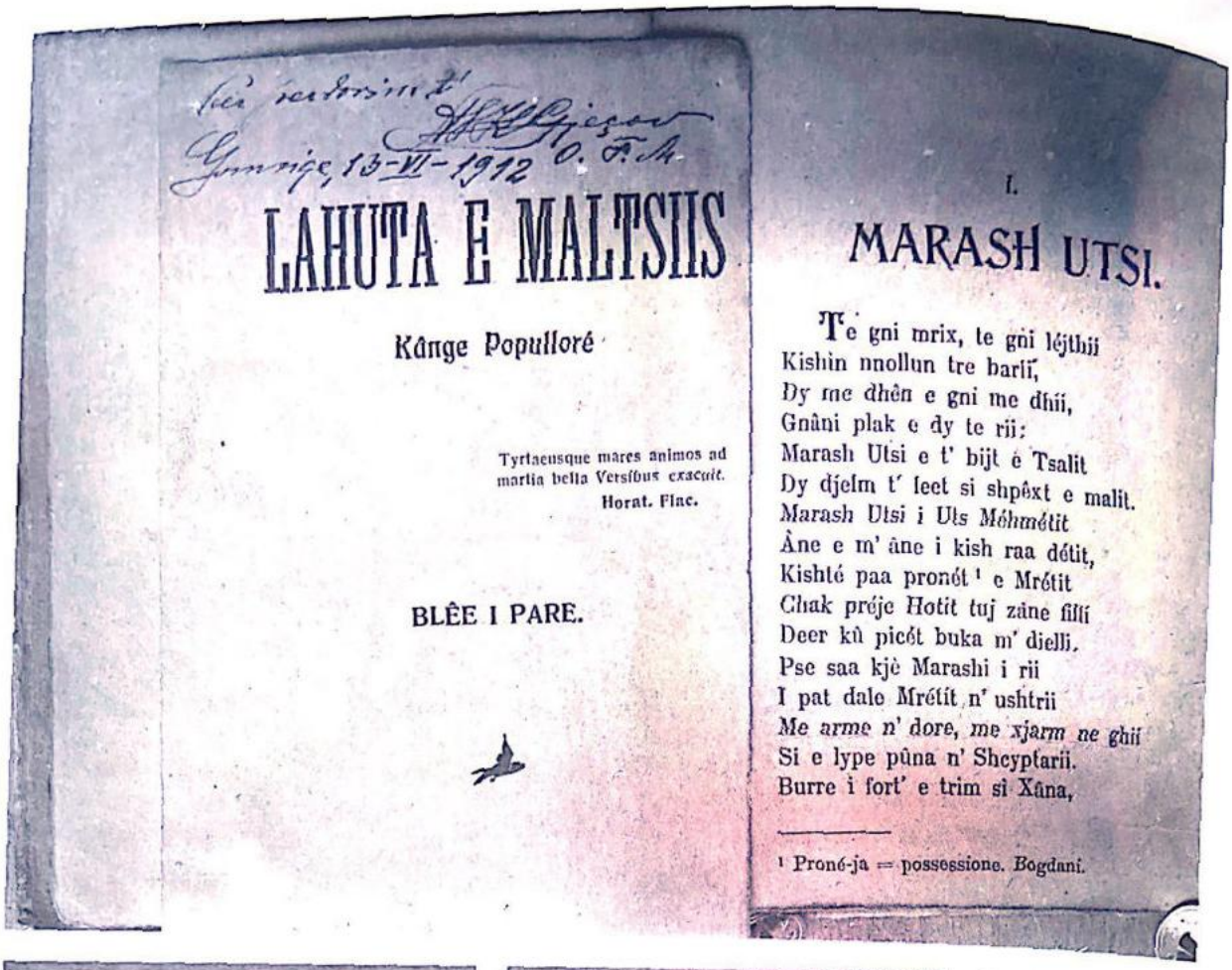


Right: Gjergj Fishta two years before his death. Painting by Umberto Giunti, Siena 1938.



Above: The great Albanian writers of the age, photographed in Shkodra, February 1938. *l to r*: Father Gjergj Fishta, Lasgush Poradeci (1899-1987), Ernest Koliqi (1903-1975) and Asdreni (1872-1947), (Photo: Marubi).

Left: Manuscript of 'The Highland Lute' in Fishta's handwriting. Here Canto 25: 164-215.



Per perdorimi t'
Gjeçov
Gjonsige, 13-VI-1912 O. F. M.

LAHUTA E MALTSIIS

Kânge Populloré

Tyrtaeusque mares animos ad martia bella Versibus exacuit.
Horat. Flac.

BLÊE I PARE.

I.

MARASH UTSI.

Te gni mrix, te gni léjthii
Kishin nnollun tre barlí,
Dy me dhên e gni me dhii,
Gnâni plak e dy te rii:
Marash Utsi e t' bijt e Tsalit
Dy djelm t' leet si shpêxt e malit.
Marash Utsi i Uts Méhmétit
Âne e m' âne i kish raa détit,
Kishté paa pronét [1] e Mrétit
Chak préje Hotit tuj zâne fillí
Deer kû picét buka m' dielli.
Pse saa kjè Marashi i rii
I pat dale Mrétit n' ushtrii
Me arme n' dore, me xjarm ne ghii
Si e lype pûna n' Shcyptarii.
Burre i fort' e trim si Xâna,

[1] Proné-ja = possessione. Bogdani.

Top: Early edition of 'The Highland Lute,' Shkodra 1912. Beginning of Canto 12.

Far left: Title page of the 1937 edition.

Left: Cover of the definitive edition of 'The Highland Lute,' Rome 1958.

Later than had Mark Milani,
It could not arrive in Nokshiq
There in time to save the region,
Stop the *çetas* from attacking,
All of Mark Milani's *çetas*,
When they thundered down the mountains
Like a wolf pack through the storm winds.
Yet, I tell myself that even
If Albania's army'd been there,
It would still have been unlikely
That Nokshiq escape the bloodbath,
Houses burnt and livestock taken,
With that Mark, that lurking vulture,
Who had with him eight battalions,
Eight battalions, lightning fury,
On the slopes and in the thickets,
Warring men they, born as fighters,
Sun and snow their hides have toughened.
In their breasts no heart is beating,
They have at their core a gravestone.
All they know is killing, slaying,
Stealing like the wolves in winter.
Land from under foot they'll pilfer,
Leave you there transfixed and helpless.
There's a saying: "When Kelmendi
Fights, the whole land goes to battle."
Nonetheless, its fate was sealed
And Nokshiq was to suffer badly,
Suffer badly and be ravaged.
Dawn arose and with its rays the
Besa came to a conclusion,
Mark Milani, long his whiskers,
With his army stood there waiting,
Like a werewolf screeched, commanding
That his forces move on Nokshiq,
That commence the final onslaught,
Off to murder, off to slaughter,
Off to scorch the earth and stonewalls,
Off to poor Sutjeska, striving
There to take live the Albanians,
Seize their weapons and their honour,
Make them serfs of Prince Nikolla.

Prince Nikolla in Cetinje.
How the women would adore him,
O'er his brow with his *kapica*,
With his whiskers whirling upwards,
Vaunting his exploits and boasting
He was lord of earth and heaven,
No one else on earth could match him,
Where the sun and moon are shining.
With the shooting, cannons roaring,
While the din and clamour echoed,
From a ridge did loose a landslide
Tumbling to the gravel canyon,
Echoed through the mountains, valleys
There as Mark Milani's army
Flew at Nokshiq in its fury,
Raising dust throughout the region.
Like the ravens upwards soaring
When a gunman sees them pecking
At the fields he's sown, and shoots one,
Like a group of hunters when out
Skulking after game and scattered
All around a grove or clearing,
Far from one another shouting,
Firing with their rifles, huffing
With the hounds, forever chasing,
They surround, besiege the hillside,
Rooting out the beasts and boars there
Hiding in the pine trees, brambles,
Other hunters lie in wait and
Shoot to give sign and direction.
Thus the Montenegrins shrieking,
Rushed on Nokshiq, souls all spiny
Like the body of a hedgehog,
Entered torching sheds and stables,
Burning huts and burning houses,
Setting fire to sheep folds, livestock
Looting, charring goods and chattel,
Here a cask and there a kettle,
Lifting laces, snitching sandals,
Cheese and butter, wheelless buckets,
Corn and grain and all the fodder,
Slaying left and right the children

In their cradles, and old men who
Ventured frailly to oppose them,
Shooting at the Montenegrins
With some faulty buttless pistol,
Old and one-eyed like their owners.
Clouds of smoke did rise and billow,
Sparks and flames made red the slopes, the
Sight would numb, transfix your body.
Livestock scampered up the hillsides,
People veered into the valleys,
Women lumbered over landslides,
Cradle-laden, clutching children,
All the little infants whining,
Offspring groped their way in darkness,
Tumbled, rose and duck-like waddled
As they fled and hastened onwards.
Luckless maidens, heavy-laden,
Staffs in hand did venture forwards,
Leading livestock from the sheep pens,
Saved from Mark Milani's hordes, and
All the while around them rushing
Back and forth were faithful sheepdogs,
Keeping eye on all the livestock.
Some lunged at the herds, while others
Nipped them, kept them in a circle,
Making sure that none did straggle,
Thus the job canines are trained for.
Yes, you'd think the dogs had fathomed,
Found out that the *shkjas* were striving
Hard as is their wont to beat you,
Plunge you in an endless abyss,
Crush your heart with stones and boulders,
With their flintstones seize and skin you,
Squeeze the soul out of your body.
Here and there an old man withered,
Wandered, staff in hand, the pathway,
Bearing on his back some grandson,
Step by step he trudged on, moaning,
Leading steer or horse in tether,
Saved from Montenegrin clutches.
Now and then screamed women loudly,
Loudly howled as they were able

From one village to the other:
"Flee, the *shkjas* have now attacked us!"
Like some lad who in the evening
On his way home with the livestock
Hurls a few stones at the oak trees,
Causing nesting birds to flutter,
Causing them in fright to scatter,
Soaring up or down the valley,
Winging warblers in the twilight,
So the poor souls there in Nokshiq
Were a-slumber in their houses
When the *shkjas* turned up with torches.
Thus the poor folk were awakened,
Heard the echo of the shouting;
To their feet they flew in panic,
Set off with their kin and livestock,
Some with shoes and others barefoot,
Over fields and gullies fleeing
For their lives towards Sutjeska
Where they hoped that in the mountains
They would find Albanian fighters
To defend them from the brutes of
Mark Milani, Slavic scion,
Who had swiftly fallen on them.
Hustling forth with heavy panting
Did they shout at one another,
Tried to keep their kin together,
Keep them moving in a huddle
To escape the foe behind them.
When the sun came up, the *shkjas* did
Turn and look around them, seeing
That the folk had fled in panic,
Seeing sheep and goat pens empty.
How they pressed on in pursuit to
Harry folk and livestock as if
Hunting feral beasts in forests,
Slaying old men and young children,
Gutting goats and killing women,
Leaving many dead and wounded,
Some in creeks and some in brooks. Your
Mind would shatter if you saw it!
The Albanians then let go the livestock,

Threw their bags into the brambles,
Took off running, like a windstorm,
Through the bushes, up the cliff sides,
Some fled straight and others zigzagged,
Thorns and rocks ignoring, that they
Save their skins from Slavic fury.
How they shrieked and how they shouted,
Moaning midst the din and clamour,
Mothers yelled and children yammered,
Maidens wept and brides lamented,
Wept, despaired amidst the carnage.
In the crags some cowered, hiding,
Some behind a cliff or plane tree,
Then to head out in a hustle,
Hurtling over walls and hedges,
O'er the cliffs to seek their refuge,
O'er the scree and slopes and hillsides,
Out of reach for Slavic rifles.
Goaded, were the cattle startled,
Snorted, raged, began to gallop,
Turned and thundered up the hillsides,
Mares a-neighing off behind them,
Sheep and goats leapt up the mountain,
Leaving clouds of dust to follow,
Clouds of dust with smoke did mingle,
Heavy smoke that clogged the cliff sides
From their farms all charred and burning,
Smoke that blocked their lungs and vision.
But I think it would be better
If we had no eyes to see it,
All the carnage and the horror,
We today must witness while they
Shoot us with their rifles, while they
Scorch and burn and turn to ashes
All our land and our possessions,
Seizing from the pens bellwethers.
Slavic women from Cetinje
Burdened down with our belongings,
Bear them off like mules and donkeys,
Cart them home to Montenegro
And with one another chatter,
With their withered corn-husk faces,

Making fun of our misfortune,
Lauding, praising one another
For the homes their husbands ravaged,
For the Albanians that they killed there,
"None were braver than my husband!"
Now I must describe a wonder,
In the sun one house was standing,
Windows closed, but doors were open,
Looked like quite a modern building,
From the chimney smoke was rising,
And beside it was a sheep pen,
Full of sheep and goats well guarded
By a watch dog, savage wolf he.
In the shed were cows and horses,
Two of each were chained together,
To the eyes they bore such beauty.
With their moon-shaped pairs of ox horns
There's no fallow land or oxcart,
Not a yoke that could defeat them,
Bought in Peja, fifteen purses!
Year by year they made their living,
Granaries full and corn cribs teeming,
Like the rich in Hoti, Plava.
Yet, there's no one to be seen here,
No one up and down the stairways,
Burdened backs with heavy baskets,
Running for their lives, escaping,
Taking sheep, goats, cows and oxen,
Though the Slavs are fast approaching,
Towards the house they are advancing,
Men with weapons, women bringing
With them knapsacks, baskets, bags to
Feed their kids with stolen goods as
They once learned from their forefathers,
Keeping up old habits long as
Gourds will float upon the water.
But some day they'll all go under.
Yes, behold, I spy a maiden,
Young girl in a white *jubleta*,
With a ribbon 'round her forehead,
Fallen down upon her eyebrows,
From her kerchief hair was dangling.

She came out upon the threshold,
Leaning one arm 'gainst the doorway,
Stood there, staring, with her legs crossed,
Staring at Nokshiq a-burning,
How the livestock had been plundered,
How in creeks and how in gravel
Lay dead women with their children,
Killed by Montenegrin bullets!
And my mind is more than certain
As I watch the maiden standing
There that she has no intention
To set off and join the others,
Save herself and save the livestock
Without which would die the Highlands.
Tell me, *Zana*, this I wonder,
Could it be that this young maiden's
Made a fatal error and is
Trysting with a Slavic lover,
And thus, waiting for her suitor,
Will not leave the house and larder,
Leaning cross-legged 'gainst the farmhouse?
Yes, her mother gave her beauty,
Body slender, a *breshana*,
Eyes like suns, the moon her forehead,
Half in bloom like apple blossoms,
Like those buds upon the branches.
When she came out on the threshold,
'twas as if spring had arrived and
Caused the warming sun to venture
Through the beeches, firs and pine trees.
God created such a beauty!
My suspicions are unfounded;
By the lilies and carnations,
Hyacinths and nightingales, by
Sparkling springs up in the mountains,
By the shade of trees in meadows,
By the butterflies o'er brooklets,
By the *oras*, *shtozovalles*,
Both by youth and by the springtime,
By the meadows, flowers blooming,
I swear there's no fairer maiden
Living under sun or moonlight.

For it happens, she's Albanian
Of a good and noble family,
Daughter she of Ulë Keqota,
Widely known as generous, liberal,
Known for weapons, words and wisdom,
Sought in councils, tribal meetings.
Never did she shame her parents
For as long as they were living,
Nor disgraced her parents' memory
When they in their graves were rotting.
Land and household did they grant her,
Mountain pastures, fields in flat lands,
Left a sheep pen full of livestock,
Best the Highlands had to offer.
Tringa was the name they gave the
Highland maiden who loved no one
But the Lord and her own brother,
That Curr Ula, splendid fellow,
When he stood, he reached the ceiling.
She above all else adored him,
For him she renounced all husbands,
Chose to stay at home a virgin
To be with her sibling longer,
To be for him sister, mother.
Born was Tringa in misfortune,
Rocks and trees took pity on her,
Since last year two Slavic bullets
Struck and wounded her poor brother
Fighting on the Highland borders.
One year later he still languished
In his bed, to stand unable.
Day and night his faithful sister
Mourned for him and tended to him,
Spared no journey, spared no money,
Fetched for him the best-known doctors,
Bought him herbs and medication.
He, alas, did not recover.
Now, the poor lad lay there dying,
Prostrate in a mute voice raving,
Just before the final hour.
Driven to despair did Tringa
Day and night sit at his bedstead,

Like a mother at a cradle,
Always tears in her eyes welling.
Could not eat or drink, said naught, to
Tend to guests she was unable,
Called a neighbour for the tending,
Paid a farm-hand for the farming.
When the sun rose on that morning,
When began the *shkja* offensive,
Razing farms and sheds to ashes,
All the neighbours, hired-help vanished,
Swiftly to their homes returning,
To be with their own relations,
Leaving Tringa all alone there,
All alone there with her brother.
Distraught and worried for her sibling,
She rose to her feet, poor maiden,
Rose and went out to the threshold,
There to see whence came the clamour.
There she saw the sky smoke-covered,
Saw the fires far down below her,
Felt the firing of the rifles,
Saw *shkja* men and women nearing,
Saw the folk of Nokshiq fleeing,
Bathed in blood the brooks and wasteland,
Heard the women, children screaming,
Hunted down by ruthless fighters.
Flee at once, her instinct told her,
Fly off swiftly, barefoot, cloakless,
Take to trails and pathless wasteland,
There to seek your own companions!
She remembered then her loved one:
"How could I here leave my brother,
Let him in his bed be slaughtered
By the *shkjas* without protection?"
This one thought her flight frustrated.
When the villagers had vanished,
Driven up the hills and meadows,
Down her spine a tremor tingled,
In her mind she fully saw and
Knew now well what fate awaited,
Saw that there was no salvation,
Understood her life was over.

Her companions fled or murdered,
Ruthless *shkjas* the hills descending,
On his bed reposed her brother,
Heaven distant, earth a desert,
Where was she to find salvation?
Cold sweat broke out on her forehead,
As she leaned against the doorway,
Blood-bathed seemed now her surroundings,
Tried to weep, but could not manage,
Tringa gasped, was suffocating,
In her breast her heart was pounding,
Dripping blood in grief and sorrow.
"Who will save you, wretched maiden?
All have left you, thus abandoned,"
Tringa to herself did murmur,
"Now the *shkjas* will slay my precious
Brother on his deathbed lying.
Were I to but drown in water!
Sombre is my eyesight, blinded
I'll be slave to Montenegro,
Put to shame my father, mother,
In their graves I will disgrace them,
Put to shame my brother's honour,
On my tribe I'll cast defilement.
Why has death poor me forgotten?
In the earth now rot my parents,
In his bed my brother's buried,
Slave of *shkjas* now, his poor sister,
Forced to cross myself like Slavs do,
To become a Slavic maiden,
In a foreign tongue to prattle,
There in Slavic lands a servant.
Why will not some mountain boulder
Loosen, fall and here inter me,
Why can't mountain lightning strike me
To preserve my honour, mother?"
Now the smoke did start to billow
Black among the beech and oak trees,
Rising on all sides around her,
Flames within them licked the heavens,
Like a wolf pack the *shkjas* echoed
Shrieking, swarming down the hillsides,

Charging swiftly at their utmost,
As they set on fire the houses,
And the Slavic women downwards
Running called to one another,
In the creeks and in the gravel,
Laughing scornfully and shouting,
Cursing, spurning one another
As they chased the sheep and cattle,
Which had scattered up the hillsides,
'til they snared them in a lasso
To be led to Montenegro,
Where on bread and blood they'd banquet.
Like a doe, of herd bereft, which
Seeks a distant, verdant clearing,
Shooting like an arrow upwards
To a fir copse, scared and frightened,
When a hunter fires his rifle,
Yet to fell it is unable,
So did Tringa there take refuge,
Pallid face and lips so sombre
When she saw the flames before her,
When she saw the *shkjas* invading.
Through the house she ran, not knowing
What to do in her confusion,
Bolted fast the door inside as
If the *shkjas* could not unlock it,
Being good at that profession,
Breaking in and taking booty,
Laying waste to farms and houses.
Numb her legs and hunched her shoulders,
Blank her glance, she sat there shaking,
Shivers down her spine were crawling.
As if she were in a snowstorm,
In her home she sat there waxen
As if sitting with a vampire.
Now with all the din and clamour,
Pealing from the mountain hollows,
Did her glance steal to the doorway,
Swiftly she recoiled in horror,
Staring blankly out before her,
Eyes surveying all around her,
Seeing that her only hope of

Saving his and her own honour
Were those few boards of the doorway,
Rotten, gnawed at by the woodworms,
Boards which soon would be in splinters,
For the *shkjas* would break right through them.
In her gloom and her depression
Everything looked Slavic to her:
Chimney chains and baskets, kettles.
Firedogs loomed like Slavic fighters,
Tobacco shredder - Mark Milani,
Kneading troughs and wooden buckets
Turned there into Slavic women.
Wretched Tringa shouted: "Mother!"
As do helpless, frightened children,
But no mother's hand did help her,
No one offered her salvation.
Now her mouth was dry and bitter,
Locked inside, that wretched maiden,
With a brother swiftly dying,
Both his feet were growing cold now!
On her childhood she reflected,
In her thoughts she saw her mother,
At a corner by the fireplace,
Sitting there as she once used to,
With a spoon in hand she hovered,
Stirring cream cheese o'er the fire,
There beside her, tiny Tringa.
So appealing was the memory,
She revived somewhat, took courage,
To her eyes returned the sparkle,
And her cheeks grew warm and rosy.
Staring at the fire before her,
Tringa uttered: "Mother, can't you
See those Slavic men and women
Come to slay your son, Curr Ula?"
But her mother was long rotted.
No one answered wretched Tringa,
Only moans rose from her brother,
And her heart broke from that moaning,
Into tears she burst out weeping,
Thinking only of her sibling,
Not of foes and her misfortune.

To his bedstead did she tiptoe,
Kissed his eyes and kissed his forehead,
Bathed his face in tears of sorrow,
Tears which from her eyes were streaming.
Thus the lad woke from his slumber,
Feeling on his face a dripping,
Something wet, and started thinking
Why and whence the drops were falling,
Thought that it was outside raining.
In a voice deranged and angered,
To himself said: "Lord Almighty,
May this house be left abandoned,
Covered o'er by mould and ivy,
Filled with whip snakes and with vipers,
That its holes should let the rain in,
That its hearth should drip with water!"
"No, my brother," she responded,
"They're not raindrops you are feeling,
There's no dripping from the timbers,
They're the tears of your poor sister."
Now her brother, face grown ashen,
With his sister first crossed glances,
Stared into her eyes, was shattered,
Took and stroked her hand so gently,
On his last breath did he whisper:
"Why the weeping, oh, my sister?
Will you break my heart asunder
While my soul escapes this body,
Bringing to a stop my breathing?
Have I treated you so badly,
Left you without food and water,
Without clothes and shoes, adornments
Like the finest Highland women?
Have I ever chided, called you
Just a maid without a mother?
Does your brother now disgust you,
Would you rather have a husband?"
On his brow she laid her hand and
To him in sweet words responded,
Wrapped his shoulders in the blanket:
"Tender sproutlet of the beech tree,
What is it that you are saying?

Has the fever gotten to you?
Rather would your sister perish
Than to leave you and get married,
Never have you talked so harshly!
You are all I need as parent,
Please therefore be not offended
If I now should tell you something.
It has been a year now, brother,
That you've on this bed been lying,
That you've languished, still unable
To get up and reach the doorway.
Should your sister not be broken
Withered like an arid summer,
Now to be enslaved to Slavdom?"
Sombrely Curr raised his eyebrows,
Moaning, muddled in his failing,
Turned and to his sister muttered:
"What is that you say, my Tringa,
How to be enslaved to Slavdom?
We're Nokshiq, they're Montenegro.
Never would the tribe allow you
Bloodless to be handed over,
Even though myself I'm dying."
Drying teardrops with her ribbon,
Did she gently answer: "Brother,
You've been ill and have not heard it,
War is raging in the Highlands,
Now the *shkjas* have entered Nokshiq,
Causing on all sides a bloodbath,
Turning homes and huts to ashes,
Seizing sheep and goats as booty,
Slaying old men, women, children!"
Hearing this, his face did darken,
Half-demented, in a whisper
Did he to his sister answer:
"What? The *shkjas* are in the Highlands?"
"And in Nokshiq," gasped his sister,
"They have come down from the hillsides,
Leaving but scorched earth behind them."
How Curr Ula blanched in horror!
How he groaned and glanced around him,
Looked up at the *huta* hanging

For a year now from the rafters,
But at once his vision faltered,
And his mind began to wander,
Ever slower was his breathing
As his final words he murmured:
"Could a worse fate e'er have happened?
Take my soul, Lord, and protect it."
It was over, he lay prostrate
In the throes of death and perished.
Tringa rushed to light a candle
And in reverent expression
Formed a cross upon his forehead,
Prayed to Christ and to the Virgin,
As he died in last convulsion
And his wretched life abandoned.
Tringa scratched to blood her cheekbones,
Pulled her brother closer to her,
Bathed his face in tears of mourning,
Kissed him, wept in desperation,
Knew within her she was broken
Now that fortune'd frowned upon her.
As she wept there for her sibling,
Tringa started thinking how she'd
Have to dress her brother, get him
Ready, bear him to the graveyard,
Where her parents had been buried.
Well she knew what clothes he needed,
But she knew not how to take him
To the graveyard, get him buried,
For the *shkjas* were burning, slaying,
Gone were all her friends, companions,
There was no one left to aid her.
Tringa ceased her mourning, weeping,
Sat so still, observed her brother,
Peered about at the utensils
On the walls and in the rafters,
Searched the other room behind her,
Full of objects, rugs and blankets,
Stood in silent contemplation,
Looking up and down around her,
Finding nowhere a solution,
No one anywhere to help her,

In the room but silent objects
Shrouded over by death's shadow,
As if in a grave she languished.
By the solitude and silence
Frightened, she recalled the stories,
Tales of corpses and of bodies
That she'd heard when she was little.
Cold sweat beaded on her forehead,
Flames did flicker in the fireplace,
And the firebrand hissed and sizzled,
Mice were scampering in the rafters.
Tringa quivered, how she trembled,
Shivers down her spine were slipping,
'gainst the wall she pressed her figure,
Thought of sitting by the fire,
At the place where it is custom
For the women in the Highlands,
Thought about her loved one's garments,
From the spot she could not budge or
Move, for fear and panic gripped her.
Parched her lips and pale her face,
She dared no longer watch her brother.
Now encircled and defeated,
Filled with horror and with sorrow,
She forgot the *shkjas* and Nokshiq,
Thought not of the bloodbath, burnings!
Then, outside, she heard the howling,
Piling hay were Slavic fighters
To set fire to a neighbour's
House up on the shady hillside,
To her feet she jumped in panic
At the screams, her teeth did chatter,
In the other room sought shelter
By an old bin used for storage.
There, amidst the beams and rafters,
In the strut, a dormer window
Lay so tiny that at noonday
No one in it would be noticed.
Rashly Tringa now decided
To take refuge in the storage
Bin and squeeze herself behind it,
To survive the Montenegrins,

Who among their smoke and fires,
Capture even mice and weasels,
Certainly they'd find the humans
Hiding in their homes in anguish.
But before she crawled inside it
Did she wonder, saying: "Oh Lord,
What's the purpose of my hiding?
What's it worth, my poor existence,
With my parents in graves rotting,
With my only brother perished,
Why should I desire to live on,
Just to move to Montenegro,
And to put myself to shame there,
Change my tribe, religion, language,
To disgrace my father, mother,
Shame the memory of my brother
Who gave up the ghost so lately?
No, praise be to God Almighty,
From this very day will Tringa
No more be among the living.
Yet, is suicide for Christian
Men and women not permitted.
I shall go out to the war grounds,
Face to face the *shkjas* encounter,
Force them in the fight to kill me.
I'll not go to Montenegro,
Let them slay me on my doorstep
For I am a Highland maiden,
Never will I cast dishonour,
Shame upon myself while living.
Please, oh Lord, take pity on me.
Yes, I may have nolens volens
Sinned before you here while living,
Daily seven times do even
Good men, yes, transgress against you.
Give me strength not to defame you,
I'm not acting so the Highlands
Will forever sing my praises,
But for honour, faith and brother,
Who lies dead, as yet unburied.
Let the *shkjas* decapitate him!
Thus insult my tribe and Highlands.

Stretch your hands out to protect me
On this final day I'm living,
Do not let the *shkjas* now catch me!"
Tringa ran back to the parlour,
Where her brother lay there, lifeless.
There she sought and seized his *huta*,
Hanging from the rack above them,
Loaded in the gun a cartridge,
Put four others in the gun belt
She around her thighs was wearing,
Tucked her hair up in her kerchief.
Huta in hand, before departing,
Did she kneel beside her brother,
Bent and kissed him on the forehead,
Murmured there in painful longing:
"Do not worry, my dear brother,
When the sun begins to set, your
Tringa will once more be with you,
Sister, brother, reunited,
Never will we two be parted."
To her feet arose the maiden,
"Help me God, and help, Saint Anthony,"
Did she murmur as she set off,
Set off for the doorway, running,
With what force she burst it open!
Nothing held the maiden back now,
Eyes on fire, her eyebrows bristling,
Ribbon fitted 'round her forehead,
Like a slender, lofty cypress,
Did she stand out in the courtyard,
Hiding at her thighs the *huta*.
Down the slope rushed Gjur Kokoti,
God resolved that he should die there,
Torch in hand was smoking, sparking,
Like a windstorm he descended,
Huge his strides along the pathway.
Far behind - two Vasoviqis,
Further up a Slavic woman
With a knapsack for the booty.
Gjur, his head in clouds, attacked the
House of Curr Ula to burn it,
Far away from his companions.

O'er his brow flapped his *kapica*,
With his robes tucked in his waist belt,
O'er one arm hung his *novica*,
In his belt was sheathed his sabre.
Like a wolf come from the wastelands,
Hungry from the snows of winter,
He approached Curr Ula's farmhouse,
Got from it within a stone's throw,
When he was espied by Tringa,
Standing, waiting in the courtyard,
Like a *zana* in the mountains,
Like the flag which leads an army.
In his tracks did Tringa stop him.
He, confused and dazed, did mumble:
"What? From Durmitor an *ora*,
Or from Vizitor the *zana*?
Who has come down to these clearings
Here to pluck some fragrant sage bush,
Or some danewort in the meadows?
By Saint Peter of Cetinje,
I've a fairer maiden never
Seen upon this earth. I think I'll
Take her back to Montenegro
As a servant for my mother."
Then the dog, son of a bitch, set
Foot, advanced in her direction,
Pacing towards her to attack her,
Getting close to her, was ready.
Tringa, swiftly backwards stepping,
Raised her rifle, armed the *huta*,
Aimed it at the *shkja* approaching,
Shot him through the chest, brave woman,
Doing honour to her tribesmen,
And the *shkja* collapsed before her,
Bullet in him, through the middle,
That the prince know in Cetinje:
Should he, yes, blot out this people,
He will still not take Albania
While Albanian maids are living.
They for honour, faith and country
View as birth their own extinction.
Thus she shot and fired her *huta*,

Sprawled lay Gjur upon the cliff side,
Guts flowed o'er the rocks and boulders,
Like in soup when float the bread crumbs.
Unmoved stood the maiden with her
Eyes both flashing like gunpowder.
At the gunshot, Gjur's companions
Ran and hid behind a boulder.
Swiftly she removed the cartridge
From the *huta,* quickly tried to
Load a second cartridge in it.
Vasil Ndreka, mountain wolf he,
Pointing at her his *novica*,
Fired and shot her through the forehead,
To the ground fell wretched Tringa
In the yard, stretched to the doorstep,
Red her cheeks, with blood bespattered,
As the sun set, spreading darkness,
Tringa living ne'er surrendered.

Canto 23

AT THE FARMHOUSE OF CURR ULA

The Albanian warrior Gjeto Gega of Shllaku arrives on the scene and avenges the murder of Tringa by slaying Vasil Ndreka. Gjeto Gega in turn is attacked by the Slav Millosh Pera in a duel which the poet compares to a fight to the death between a lion and a tiger. In their struggle, Millosh Pera stumbles over the corpse of Vasil Ndreka and is slain by Gjeto Gega, who severs Vasil's head and hurls it into the courtyard where it lands beside the body of the lifeless Tringa. Further duels are portrayed throughout the canto during which the Montenegrin and Albanian heroes mock and jeer at each other in epic fashion. Mark Milani resolves to send in the army to assist the Montenegrin fighters.

Tringa withered in the courtyard
Like a bloom, or some great canvas
On a sailboat, hailstone-tattered.
Vasil Ndreka, fierce demeanour,
Savage, dauntless, grey-haired hero,
Had but one thing on his mind, to
Murder, stab and go marauding.
To the sheep pen did he hasten,
Like a storm cloud from a north wind,
There the sheep and goats to gather,
Fatted lambs and kids there teeming.
"Where're you going? I mourn your mother!"
Giant Gjeto Gega cried out
From the rock face 'cross the valley,
Branch-like whiskers downwards winding.
Panting fast and soaked in sweat, the
Hero hurried down the hillside,
Through the fir trees he came hustling,
Just as Vasil in his trousers
To his cheek put his *novica*,
Pulled the trigger, felling Tringa,
Blood in floods flowed from her forehead.
All the while, Albanian troops were
Marching through the mountain pastures,
Line in line and band for band
By beech and fir trees from Sutjeska,

Over hillocks, passes, scree slopes.
There they met the women, children,
Old men, maidens running towards them,
Heard that *shkjas*, their foes, had risen,
Staging an assault on Nokshiq.
Which with fire and sword they'd ravaged.
How the men were filled with anger,
Blood and gall did seethe within them,
No one waited for an order,
None from first to last would listen,
Like wild beasts they set off, rushing,
Racing down the slopes and gorges,
Leftwards some and rightwards others,
Some were stiff and others supple,
But their eyes were all gunpowder,
Hearts with dynamite were loaded,
As they hurtled onwards, panting,
Calling, cursing from a distance.
How they spread and how they scattered,
Some to guard the peaks were climbing,
Some sped towards the creeks and canyons,
Fast advancing, fast attacking,
Others kept watch in the clearings,
But their feet were ever moving,
All to sacrifice were ready
And to die, Nokshiq defending,
Two to one, avenge the others.
Hearts to stone turned, did the heroes
Press on swiftly o'er the hillsides,
Like the livestock of Nikë Syku
On the slopes of Koprivniku
When they pasture in the meadows,
When they clamber up the mountains.
Gjeto Gega, man from Shllaku,
Ruddy cheeks like pomegranates,
Of his tribe was he protector,
Was a lad with *drangue* powers,
He advanced on his companions,
Leaping crag to crag before them,
And from over Curr's poor farmhouse
He observed how Vasil Ndreka
Murdered Tringa, stormed the sheep pen.

With what words did Gjeto curse him
And insult the fighter's mother,
Then he aimed at him his *huta*,
And did shoot him through the noggin,
Fired a bullet through his temples.
Eyeballs spinning, Vasil slumped and
Sprawled to one side of the cliff face.
Dead he lay there. At that moment
Gjeto drew, unsheathed his sabre,
Rushed at Vasil, chopped his head off.
Vasil, though, had right behind him
Strong and spry, a fellow fighter,
Like a bear, wide were his shoulders,
On his back he'd haul you, brother,
From Nokshiq right to Cetinje,
Never getting tired or weary.
Tree stump did his head resemble,
Covered all with knots and knuckles,
Stubby nose and eyes a-goggle,
Two moustaches curling downwards,
And his trousers, you'd imagine,
Five large corn sacks could encompass.
On his feet goat-leather sandals
Made of tendons and of sinew,
Woollen cords and laces on them,
Fashioned by his Slavic housewife
On that day he joined the army,
Fire in heart and holding weapons,
Huge in stature, loutish fellow,
Brave this *shkja*, with neither pistol
Nor a sabre in his waist belt.
O'er his arm just a *novica.*
Both his eyes like metal glowing,
Both his hands resembled anchors,
And his name was Millosh Pera,
Tribesman of the Vasoviqi.
When he witnessed Vasil's murder,
Gjeto Gega nearing swiftly,
Saw him leap from cliff to boulder,
Saw him brandishing his sabre,
Saw when Gjeto chopped the head off
Vasil's body. Then he pulled down

His *kapica* o'er his eyebrow,
Aimed and fired, but he missed him,
His *novica*'s bullet skidding,
Gjeto'd ducked, it passed the body.
Then he snatched a second cartridge,
Could not load it since the casing
Of the first lodged in the barrel.
Pulled the trigger, nothing happened.
How he gnashed his teeth and molars,
Hurled the rifle down the cliff side!
Down to Vasil's body did the
Fighter flash and seize his sabre,
From the sheath he drew it, searching
Gjeto Gega to encounter,
With his blade, a slash, to stop him.
It can happen that a lion
In an oak grove poised in fury
Is about to seize a roebuck
Grazing in the grassy meadows.
Just before the prey's assaulted,
Lopes a tiger down the hillside
Charging swiftly at the roebuck.
Meal forsaking, then the lion
Swiftly sets upon the tiger.
Now the beasts in mortal combat,
Fiercely biting, fiercely gnashing,
Flay and slash at one another,
With their teeth as keen as razors,
With their claws as sharp as meat hooks,
How they roar and how they bellow,
Serpents slither off in panic,
Bears take swiftly to the hills and
Beasts and wild boars run, stampeding.
On the *shkja* pounced Gjeto Gega,
Both men fighting in close combat,
Tackled, flew at one another,
Brandishing their awesome sabres,
Tried to chop the other's head off,
Food provide for crows and jackdaws.
When the Slavic women saw them,
Gjeto Gega, Millosh Pera,
Sparring, wrestling one another,

How they howled and how they hollered,
Calling to the Montenegrins
After plunder in the mountains,
To give Millosh their assistance,
Save him from the plight and trouble
He'd encountered in that moment.
Millosh Pera had such forearms,
Thick and solid like a cart shaft.
He had been a dauntless hero,
Neither fire nor water stopped him,
Nothing made him blink, not even
Warfare with the sultan's men. He'd
Made weep many Muslim women,
Was an expert marksman who would
Hit an egg upon a man's head,
Hit a branch to fell an apple,
Hit a flying falcon's eyeball,
But at fighting on the war grounds
He was not a prime example.
Poor Millosh did not have means to
Go and buy himself a sabre,
But a small field did he own with
Maybe just a grapevine on it,
To his name no cows or oxen,
Just a lambkin or some kid-goat.
Just a chicken coop his farmhouse,
Nothing in it, like a wolf's den,
Mushroom-high outside, his corn crib,
Had but one hen and a donkey,
Wife and children in privation,
Sometimes eating, sometimes starving.
Like a mountain wolf he lived, e'er
Howling, hungry in the moonlight.
Nonetheless, this Slavic lad was
Generous-hearted. Guests he offered
Buttermilk and salt and bread loaves.
Due respect he paid them always,
As befits the finest fighter
If he's deemed to be a hero.
Though you come in rags or riches,
Gun and table will be laden,
Never has a hero hungered,

Never goes a falcon preyless.
Even if he starts out badly,
He'll be two-fold compensated.
Thus it was with Millosh Pera,
He, no expert with the sabre,
Though courageous as a viper,
Awkward was he with his weapon.
Thus when he barged into battle,
Face to face with Gjeto Gega,
He soon found he'd met his match, for
Such dire straits he'd never been in.
His offensive proved a failure,
Screened himself using his sabre,
Stepping backwards and retreating
Each time Gjeto strode towards him.
There they stood, the dauntless heroes,
Set at one another, fighting,
Sabres twirling all around them,
You'd have thought them maize a-slicing,
Did not seem like they intended
To chop one another's heads off,
Looked like they were cleaving melons
For some clients in the market.
Thus they grappled in hand combat,
Gjeto forwards, Millosh backwards,
Gjeto lunged to dice his foe up,
Millosh like an eel too slippery
Backed off, managed thus to dodge him.
Firmly fixed his glance on Gjeto,
Step by step he now retreated,
To escape from Gjeto's sabre,
But his heel bumped on the body
Of that Slavic scion, Vasil,
Sprawled out dead upon the cliff side.
Falling, on his rear he thudded,
Head back, without his *kapica.*
His *kapica* set off rolling,
In a stagnant bog it landed,
Letters on it, muddy reading.
Gjeto Gega then assaulted,
Holding high in hand his sabre,
But too great a task it was to

Hack the head off on that cliff side,
Too long would the job have taken,
And he had no time to waste there,
So he stabbed him in the belly,
Turned the sabre hand's breadth upwards.
By a tuft of hair he then seized
Vasil's head, who on the rock face
Lay dead, splayed out near some bushes,
Gripped it hard and in his fury
As if with a butcher's cleaver,
Cut it, carved it with his sabre,
Starting from the nape he sawed it,
'til he held it like a melon,
And the noggin which he'd severed
From the nape, he heaved with one hand,
Flung it like a Vraka pumpkin,
Slung it in the yard where supine
Lay poor Tringa's lifeless body,
There the noggin rolled, rebounding,
With the hole still through the temples,
Spraying blood throughout the courtyard,
'til it slowed and finally rested,
Nudging at the toes of Tringa.
Gjeto turned to carry on, but
Such a sight there, Millosh Pera,
Soul still firmly in his body.
Just when Gjeto turned, departing
Millosh rose to hands and knees, with
Head bowed like an ox attacking,
Over rocks and scree set crawling,
Captured Gjeto by one pant leg,
Prostrate to the ground he felled him,
Groping, did he seize his sabre,
Poised it to make Gjeto headless,
But he lacked the force, poor lad, his
Eyes grew dim, his soul was ebbing.
From his hand did fall the sabre,
Clanking did it hit the rock face.
To the ground did he fall sprawling,
Died upon the rocky crag there,
Making of his wife a widow,
Leaving three sons and four daughters.

How those Slavic women jumped on
Gjeto! May the Lord confound them!
Like two vipers set upon him,
One was Stanja, one was Janja,
Both of them were real *kulshedras*.
With her claws did skinny Stanja
Seize his left hand, grabbing, clutching.
Janja's strength was like a mule, and
Cockeyed she, a swarthy young crone,
Apt at weaving and at shooting,
Turned up somewhere from Cetinje,
More a man she than a woman.
Like a witch, her prey assaulting,
Did she try to snatch his sabre,
With it aimed to chop his head off,
Slay that Gjeto, ugly scarecrow,
Thus disgracing all Albania.
And indeed, I must admit it,
Though a certain shame befalls me,
On that day that Slavic daughter
Almost sliced and slaughtered Gjeto,
Sent his head back to Cetinje
For the prince to make a present.
Had she done so and succeeded,
They'd have made a horse tail of us.
Shkja maids would have sung her praises:
"Praise to Janja who slew Gjeto,
Gjur Kokoti's death avenging,
Not in vain the death of Millosh!"
But the Lord assisted Gjeto,
For to help himself he couldn't,
Helped and came to his salvation.
With his skull he pounded Janja,
Knocked her on the nose and broke it,
Wretched Janja reeled in torment,
Blood-bespattered, she was blinded,
Tottering, she swooned and buckled,
Slumping onto Gjeto Gega.
Not a tear the witch emitted,
And, my friends, to tell the truth, I
Pity her, I must admit it,
Janja was in fact a hero.

On that day an *ora*'d sent her
Gjeto's ramming head to counter.
Wracked with pain and rueful heart,
With hand on nose, the Slavic woman
Sat and cowered, felt regretful.
To his feet sprang Gjeto Gega,
Blood-red eyes aflame in fury.
Wild, he gnashed his teeth and tore
A stock of juniper so prickly,
With it, thrashed the Slavic women,
Slashing Stanja, bashing Janja,
'til their backs were raw and bleeding,
Giving to them equal doses.
Both the Slavic women yammered,
Gjeto yet continued thrashing,
Cursing rudely both their parents,
'til they vanished o'er the hillside.
Blood still dripping from his sabre,
Both his pistols in his gun belt,
In a dash loped Gjeto Gega
To recuperate his *huta*,
Lying on the rock face, while he'd
Fought the Slavic women, when a
Shkja aimed at him his *novica*,
Shot him just above the navel,
Vuk Kërrstiq was, yes, the marksman,
Lad whose teeth could bite through iron,
Nose as hairy as a wolf's hide,
Branch-like whiskers downwards bending.
No lad better as a marksman
Or as best man for a wedding.
Tough as bricks and hard as oak wood.
Give him bread, salt or a rifle,
For his prince he'd perish, willing.
He'd deny not faith or country
Even to be bey or sultan,
Even given Egypt's riches.
Kërrstiq led his ox, was plodding
With a laden horse before him,
Huffing up the barren hillside,
Through the fields and over ridges.
There the fighter did encounter

Vasil Ndreka, splayed out, headless.
Millosh Pera lying lifeless.
He saw Gjeto there before him
Crouched among the rocks in waiting,
With his finger on his *huta*.
How his heart was filled with fury!
Blood and bile did rise within him,
Up on end his hair was standing,
Horse and ox he bound to bushes,
Hid himself behind a boulder,
Fired at Gjeto his *novica*.
Gjeto crumpled on the rock face,
Kërrstiq rushed to slice the head off,
Like a wolf in moraine prowling
Towards a kid goat or some booty.
Gjeto quickly drew his pistol,
Even faster aimed and fired it,
Skinned the *shkja* well, yes, he felled him,
Ripped the soul out of his body.
On his chest he left him lying,
Sprawled out over stones and rubble,
Making festive food for jackals,
He the erstwhile dauntless hero!
To the ground had Vuk been hurtled,
Like a log canoe he lay there.
Proud and haughty passed a *çeta*,
Shkjas from Palabardhaj marching,
Through the rocks and scree advancing,
Guns in hand, in belts their sabres,
Lethal like some bottled poison,
Now their mothers would bemoan them.
One had black eyes, looked so evil,
One a horselike head and birdbrain,
One a robber, one a miser,
One a serf and one a cutthroat,
All of them were valiant, though, like
Jozja, son of Vukadini,
Matiq Jure with his *zdragusha*,
That commander from Kolashin,
Mihajl, son of Bozho Ikiq,
Spiro Neshi, the foolhardy,
He the world's bread, and great speaker,

Black-haired hero Jak Taraba
Of a generous, noble family,
Vuksan Leka, valiant fighter,
And the two lads come from Nikshiq:
Spiro Zeka and Gjoko Ilija,
Gjoko, that young whippersnapper,
To his knees would reach the deep sea,
When he galloped o'er the boulders
He surpassed all his companions,
'neath his cap were brains and reason.
At the time of his arrival
At the farmhouse of Curr Ula,
Did the lad espy Vuk Kërrstiq
Fleeing without his companions,
With a swish he drew his sabre,
Hastened forth to chop the head off
Gjeto, to become a prized and
Peerless fighter, fabled so the
Slavs would one day sing his praises.
Things, though, were not as he wanted,
Fate lent him a shortened lifespan.
As he set out with his sabre,
There emerged from the pine forest
Lucë Gjeloshi, man of Gruda,
Mountain wolf he, on that cliff side,
Handsome fellow, noble family,
Bushy eyebrows, curly whiskers.
He was famed and foremost in the
Highlands and in Montenegro
For his speaking and his rifle,
Caused no shame to friends and kinsmen.
When he saw the *shkjas* descending
Saw that Gjoko swiftly running,
Did he take position, waiting
There amidst the plane trees, boulders.
Then, when Gjoko with his sabre
Lunged at Gjeto and prepared to
Slice his head off like a melon,
Lucë did raise and aim his rifle,
Fired and shot him in the armpit,
Through his brow emerged the bullet.
Gjoko gave a scream and buckled,

Tumbled, flattened like a pancake,
Right beside the head of Kërrstiq,
Making food (oh Lord, how sad!) for
All the dogs and snakes of Nokshiq.
Hollowed like a squash his skull was,
Empty like a gourd that head which
Once bore proudly his *kapica*.
Charming was that lad who once did
Wink and flutter with his eyelids.
On the day he joined the army,
With his garments, shoes and weapons,
Gun in hand and soul in fervour,
On his brow flat his *kapica*,
Did his wretched mother warn him:
"Your head's not a gourd or bottle,
If you lose it, there's no market,
You can't buy it back with money."
Then the poor old woman added:
"Look before you leap, I beg you,
For the Albanians, God protect us,
Are a savage bunch of serpents."
But the lad was young and foolish,
And the prince deceived him, claiming
The Albanians could not shoot well,
Easy game they were for catching.
Thus he rushed off, the poor fellow,
Plunging headlong down the hillside,
Using not the trails and switchbacks,
Rather, flying like an arrow.
Lucë, the marksman, aimed and shot him,
May the Lord take pity on him,
Made his skull a gourd for water,
Made his mother ever mourn him.
Seeing Gjoko Ilija perish,
Did a Slavic *çeta* speed off
Down the mountain like a windstorm,
Swiftly sprang from cliff to boulder,
Guns in hands, in teeth their sabres,
Through the bushes, gorse and brambles,
Hastened towards Curr Ula's farmhouse,
Now forlorn and all forsaken.
Lucë Gjeloshi, handsome youth he,

With his bayoneted rifle
Shot at the assaulting Slavic
Fighters vaulting down the mountain,
But the bullets whizzing by them,
Spewed from his Martini rifle,
Did not seem to much impress them,
Figured they were corks a-flying,
No grounds thus to stop their onset.
Rather, crazed and gone berserk in
Giant steps they seized the hillside,
Down to 'venge the dead and injured.
But then, from that fir-wood forest
Dark, emerged some Highland heroes,
Like a snowstorm now appeared there
Lul Rapuka, Pllum Gjeloshi,
Eyes a-glowing, Baca Luc Dedi,
Pjetër Gjokë Toshi, clever fellow,
With Muç Hasi, Prêlë Mehmeti,
Maça Grizhi, Shyta Pema,
Ndoc Gjo' Goci and Prêlë Keri,
Two lads strong as steers you'd think them,
You would even shun their shadows,
Then Turk Shabi, with three hearts he,
Gjeto Marku, flame and powder,
Tomë Daci whose heels have never
Fled from any Slavic fighter,
Then Jus Muça, Marash Vata,
With his son came Shpend Delija,
Like a rainstorm in the nighttime,
Cannon fire could not stop them.
Like a wolf pack in a clearing:
Cac Kaçeli, Voc Cungeli,
Lul Pal Kiri, Nishk Djalë Miri,
Dum Buzuku, Col Çamuku,
With them Brahokol Demushi,
Then came Islam Makalushi,
Also pockmarked Maça Keqi,
With a watch and with a fez, was
Dressed and shod just like a noble,
Who in Lezha by the Chennar
Where the merchants and wayfarers
Suffer drought in summer, winter,

Built a fountain of pure water,
From his money made in honour,
Brought through rock land finest water
From the hillside of the fortress.
That is why his soul is blessed so
Fondly by the population.
When they saw the slain before them,
Saw the *shkjas* at hand attacking,
To kill Gjeto, leave him headless,
Did the fighters set off howling
Like a wolf pack down Peshteri,
Headlong hurtling down the cliff side,
Ready to fight man to man, where
Gjeto on his side did languish,
Holding in his hand his pistol,
Like a *zana*, keen to fire it,
Blast a bullet through the chest of
The first *shkja* who should approach him.
There the fighters did encounter
One another, how they struggled,
Started slaying one another,
Face to face *shkja* and Albanian!
How they grappled everybody,
How they raged and how they rampaged,
Like in rutting time the wild boars,
How their sabres they did brandish!
None cared much for their existence
As they risked their lives in combat,
As they brawled with one another,
Harried, wearied their opponents,
Claws around their necks to kill them,
Some were strangled, others stumbled
To the ground and lay there sprawling,
On their backs their foes did spring and
Squeezed the breath out of their bodies,
Bashed their heads 'gainst ground and boulders,
Crushed their souls in pain and torment
Talons used, like a *kulshedra*'s,
Snarled and knotted on the war grounds,
More like snakes in rock recesses,
Or like lake eels stuck together,
When the heavy storm clouds gather,

Bolts at night of lightning flashing,
Thunder growling in the distance.
Tangled up in one another,
In a ball the eels in thousands
Swirl down slowly to the seabed
While the storm growls in the heavens
And on land midst soil and furrows
Little figs drop from the branches.
Not unlike them, my companions,
Many heads plopped to the gravel,
To be gobbled by the ravens,
Crows and jackdaws chawing on them.
With their beaks they'll peck the eyes out.
Woe to him, alas, what carnage!
Whose pate first rolled in the gravel?
'twas the head of an Albanian,
Skull of Brahokol Demushi,
Settler from Mount Barbullush, his
Ora sent him off to Nokshiq,
There, a Vasoviq to square with,
Branko, son of Tomo Mili.
With his sabre did the latter
Lop the head off of his body,
Left it like a jug or melon.
Blood-bathed did the body tumble,
Brahokol lay dead and lifeless,
On the ground, thumped like a girder,
With his chest mired in the gravel.
Seemed the ground quaked at that moment
When to earth the body thudded.
When a person butchers cattle,
Cow or steer or some yoked oxen
At a mountain place of slaughter,
When the beast is skinned and with a
Cleaver is the meat divided,
Should the other cattle happen
Then to come back home from pasture,
Or set early off for grazing,
At the smell of blood they tremble,
Check their pace and sniff the air to
Find out whence the smell's arising,
To the site they gallop

Seeing where the cow or ox was butchered,
Hang their heads while gathered 'round it,
With their hooves the ground a-pawing,
With their horns they prod the victim,
Then move off with one another,
Altogether saddened, lowing
For the blood spent on the commons,
Men would shiver in their footsteps.
So it was with the Albanians,
When they saw the meadow bloodstained,
Brahokol there headless, lying,
In their eyes rose gall. What fury
Sent them 'gainst the *shkjas* to battle!
None cared much of their existence,
But like vampires did they lunge out
And assaulted one another,
Young 'gainst old and old 'gainst youngsters,
Anyone who was beside them,
In their eyes was fury flaming,
Hearts were burning like a mine shaft.
With their heels dug in the gravel,
Rocks were hurled to the horizons,
At their lips the foam did lather
As they grappled and they struggled
And incited one another.
Underfoot the earth did shudder!
Maça Grizhi, stocky fellow,
How he brandished then his sabre
At commander Llazo Stani,
Both a-bashing like two boulders
Crashing into one another.
Matiq Jure, brawny hero,
O'er his eyebrow his *kapica*,
With his robes tucked to his waist belt,
How he stood his ground though wearied,
Harried much by his opponent.
Maça Keqi with his sabre
Stretched before him in the battle,
Gave his foes no moment's respite.
Forehead sweating like the dewdrops,
Look how Ndoc Gjo' Goci lunged out
At a *shkja* from Gjurakoci,

Born in Kosova but taken
As a child to Montenegro,
Miter Spasi's what they called him,
Mighty hero, like a *zana*,
Huge, his head would reach the ceiling.
Three hearts thumped inside Ndoc Gjoni,
Stubby, did not reach the armpits
Of the *shkja*, and yet his heels did
Never turn back in a battle,
Eyes a-glowing, heart gunpowder,
God in heaven, be my witness!
With the cruel *shkja* Ndoc now grappled,
Back and forth did he pursue him,
Slashing at him with his sabre!
Hey, slow down, oh Ndoc Gjo' Goci,
For a *shkja* you've ne'er encountered,
They're not carp in weirs for catching
In the swamps of Kakarriqi,
They're the mighty sons of mothers,
And they'll swiftly leave you headless,
If you meet them on the war grounds,
And you've met them now, poor fellow,
On these rocky cliffs of Nokshiq.
Gjeto Staka, halfwit hero,
Came out of the beechwood forest,
Boasting, bragging in derision,
With a rifle o'er his shoulder,
And a sabre in his gun belt,
Ears he had as on a she-bear,
Grimly flexed his teeth defiant,
With two pistols tooled by Tusha,
Handles fashioned, twinned like serpents,
Lethal from a distant hillside,
Cost twelve purses down in Shkodra.
On one thigh a cartridge pouch all
Styled in silver filigree with
Trims and tassels dangling from it.
He had once in Lezha slain a
Turkish horseman who'd beforehand
Taunted him for his religion,
Using words for men unseemly,
While he was in Shkodra and was

Walking unarmed through the market.
Now a foe of Montenegro,
Like a bruin come from Sharri,
Did he swiftly set off, running
Through the clearings and the landslides,
Drew his sabre from its sheath which
Blazed like lightning from the heavens.
Like a bear when near a cavern
Full of honey, bees will swarm out
And around the beast in fury,
All will sting it, but no matter,
With its snout in sweetness does the
Bear show no reaction to them.
Thus the Montenegrin fighters
Roused to action, swarmed and mustered,
When up in the alpine clearing,
Up beyond the cliffs and crags,
Appeared that halfwit Gjeto Staka,
Hurtling downwards through the thickets,
Towards the war grounds of the *zana*,
Like an eagle after chickens.
How the groups did form and gather,
All the heroes, fearsome fighters,
Bumping into one another,
In their daze and their confusion,
Then branched out in all directions.
Some did tumble down the gorges,
Some advanced and some retreated,
Skulls were shattered in the scramble,
Arms were lopped off by the sabres,
Blood did stream down pants and waistcoats,
Scarlet-drenched were cloaks and jackets.
How the *shkjas* displayed their weapons,
But held pace at Gjeto Staka.
Thus, the fighters tiptoed backwards,
Had no courage to approach him
When they saw him with his sabre,
When they saw Gjeto assaulting,
Lightning hero in a tempest.
Mihajl Draga, eyes a-flashing,
Like in olden days a hero,
Was a spry and feisty fighter,

Knotted was his shirt on one side,
Steeled his heart, to stone he turned it,
As he set to move on Gjeto,
Like the Turks attacking Moscow.
Gjeto Staka, serpent-eyed he,
Swung his sabre like the scythe of
The Grim Reaper. "Steadfast, Mihajl,
Don't back off now," cried commander
Vuku, standing at a distance,
But too late for that poor fellow.
For his head was soon a-hurtling
To the ground from Gjeto's sabre.
He has now forgotten plans to
Go back to his wife and children,
Tired and starving back in Njegosh.
Gjeto then let out a scream and
Shouted, shrieked in all directions,
As if at a round-dance calling,
Set on Vuku, the commander,
Right hand of the *gospodari*,
Vuku was a falcon hero,
Yet he did not wait to meet him,
Fled from Gjeto to his comrades,
Like a slippery eel escaping,
Set off leaping up the hillside,
Wanted to alert an army
Which would save all his companions,
Set on, harried by a Cyclops,
See if he could find salvation.
Didn't get too far, poor fellow,
Lucë Gjeloshi there in hiding,
Raised his bayoneted rifle,
Fired and caught him in the hipbone.
Shot, he fell to earth a-clawing,
Long his tearful wife will mourn him,
Like a cuckoo in bare branches.
Vuku lay there dead, spreadeagled.
Into view rushed Lul Çamuku,
Swarthy fellow from Merturi,
Like a she-bear from a cavern,
Swiftly got to Gjeto Gega,
Girded him onto his shoulders.

With the load he set off loping
As a wolf bears off a kid goat,
Carried Gjeto to a valley,
Near a spring below a plane tree,
Where the Albanians all assembled
Like a hailstorm in the north wind,
On the ground he laid the hero,
Gave him water with his headgear,
Then relieved him of his gun belt,
Spread upon his wounds tobacco,
Hoping thus to halt the bleeding,
Fastened once again the gun belt,
Rolled a cigarette to hand him,
From his pocket took his flintstone,
Gave the flint a strike to start it,
When the sparks had hit the tinder,
Lit the cigarette to smoke it.
Then a flask of raki drew out
Which he held for him to drink from,
For they say that raki helps you
If you're gouged with holes from gunshots.
From his bag a clove of garlic
Dried he pulled and placed it under
Gjeto's head; for it is said that
Garlic's what you gobble when you
Ward off evil eyes and witches.
While Lul on his shoulders hoisted
Gjeto Gega, wounds attending,
Did he notice more than one head
Rolling on the ground around him,
Savage dicing and much slicing
Left dead myriad *shkjas,* Albanians.
Thus, had perished Arif Bishi,
Shyta Pema, Lano Grishi,
And the son of Let Putani.
Risto, son of Savo Sula,
Slashed and slew him with his sabre,
At the farmhouse of Curr Ula.
Gjeto Staka killed that fearless,
Savage fighter Mihajl Draga,
Who with rods beat his companions
Just as often as he wanted.

Then he slaughtered Petko Babiq,
Tverdko Illia, Trifon Mandiq,
Finished, too, Jovo Nevjestiq,
Jovo, yes, whose wretched mother
Had no other son to tend to.
Gjeto, sly old wolf, however,
Had not thought well through the matter,
Did not weave to end his plotting.
He fell victim to a sabre,
Struck upon the head, an ear gone,
And one of his eyes now missing,
Like a salt vat was his skull split,
Hood and head cast in the gully,
To be licked by hounds from Nokshiq.
Yes, a certain Vuçeniqi
Well took vengeance for a comrade.
That Cac Dede, furious fighter,
Felled him to the ground a-sprawling,
There to feed the eagles, falcons,
And attract the nearby martens,
Slinking 'round them in the moonlight.
Kadiq Pera, woodland wolf he,
Stocky fellow, *zana* hero,
Set out after Voc Cungeli,
Hewed the head off that poor fellow,
Blinding thus his wife forever,
She a widow with four children,
Has no land or Highland cabin,
Snake and mice take pity on her.
Muça Hasi, noble man he,
Scattered skulls like empty bottles,
Set out running like a madman
Up behind Jovo Sokoli,
Jovo was a fearless fighter,
With his teeth he'd bite through iron,
Swarthy fellow, skull a pitcher,
Muça cleft his head in twain, 'twas
Split like a Bar pomegranate.
After that, Pipo Gërrzhiqi,
Grass-thick moustache, hair all bristly,
Having lopped Tungj Pepa's pate off,
Noticed Jovo's skull was severed,

Split in twain, two sections lying.
How the veins bulged on his forehead,
How he made off after Muça,
Ne'er left unavenged poor Jovo.
Jovo lay dead in the gravel.
On his body danced the ravens,
Rascal fellow, but his judgment
Was not what it should have been there.
Lo, appeared one Lul Kapuka,
Valiant fighter, and assailing,
Chased him up and down the war grounds,
Like a squall upon the ocean,
And, at last, the sabre got him,
Through the neck right to the wind pipe,
Yet, the head could not be severed,
By a bit of skin it dangled,
On the fellow's chest a-bobbing,
Like a nosebag full of feed grain.
From the throat the blood did spurt and
Spewed all down that poor man's body,
Just like water in the millwheel.
Thus the heroes fought and struggled,
Ever grappling one another,
All entangled did they fight on,
Race of giants and Cyclopes.
From one barren slope did shoot a
Çeta of Albanian fighters
At that pack of *shkjas* a-leaping
From one cliff onto another,
Some light-minded lads among them
Off to succour their companions
At the farmhouse of Curr Ula,
There to meet with the Albanians
Chopping one another's heads off,
None cared much for their existence.
You would think it were a slaughter
House and not a farmer's cottage,
Human meat was for the viewing,
Many clients in the line-up.
When the Albanian fighters turned up
On the barren slope, beholding
All the bodies there before them,

Some were headless, some were wounded,
Some were cut up pretty badly,
Some were sliced and others slaughtered,
When they saw the Montenegrins,
Who in combat are real craftsmen,
Down the slopes like hail they hurtled,
Guns in hands, in teeth their sabres,
Looming giants and Cyclopes.
All were rushing down the hillsides,
Down to rescue their companions,
With their *hutas* started shooting
At the *shkjas'* advance to stop them.
To the ground the *shkjas* did plummet,
Fleeing bayoneted rifles,
Hid their heads behind the boulders,
All spaced out at equal distance,
Ready, cocked were their *novicas*.
Then the rifles started blasting
'cross the barren slopes and ridges,
Hissed like juniper in chimneys,
One side fired, the other answered,
One side bragged, the other boasted,
Hurling insults at the others,
As if it were merely child's play,
And not reaping skulls, head harvest,
Snatching souls from one another,
Snuffing souls in grim derision.
Maça Grizhi, eagle, shouted:
"Slow your pace, oh Montenegrins,
This, our land's a vicious country,
You will find no peace and quiet
'til I've chased you to Cetinje,
'til three hundred heads have fallen,
'til three thousand Slavic women
Mourn for that poor maid you slaughtered,
When you withered youth and summer.
Turks and Slavs have ne'er been wont to
Turn a gun upon a maiden."
Then spoke bear-eyed Gjokë Serdari:
"Greet me as you wish, Albania,
Offer bullets, black gunpowder,
For I've never been more ready.

Hear my words, for God's my witness,
I've not come here for a wedding,
I've not come here as godfather,
Nor to bring to you good tidings,
I've come here to kill and pillage,
Here to torch the earth and boulders,
Ravage one hill, then another,
'til I one day enter Shkodra,
There to raise the *trobojnica*
In the fortress and, Albania,
Place upon you my *kapica,*
Pull it tightly o'er your forehead,
Make the world laugh and deride you."
Thus the fighters bragged and vaunted,
Jeered at one another, taunted,
Slinging words of scorn and insults.
How the fighters sprang in fury
As the din and clamour begun
By the *hutas* and *novicas*,
Echoed down to Brezovica,
Komarusha, Treskavica!
Mark Milani, valiant hero,
When he saw the clouds of smoke which
Hid the heavens over Nokshiq,
Gazed at them as he was resting,
Put his belt on and his weapons,
Donned his knee boots and made ready,
Called the army into action,
Mustered men up in the mountains,
There before him, six battalions,
Some were tanned and others sunburnt,
Some had whiskers to their waist belts,
Some were old, but most were young ones,
All resolved in war to perish
For their prince and Montenegro.
Mark retrieved his dappled courser,
Put the Italian bridle on it,
And the patent leather saddle,
With three bellybands he girthed it.
Like a *zana* reared the courser,
Reared the steed, now neighing loudly,
Like all steeds there, ate fine fodder,

'twas the prince who'd fed the courser,
When he set off for Albania.
Mark, with storm-cloud eyes, now placed his
Feet well in the stirrups, mounting,
Rode the courser off to Nokshiq,
Down the lofty mountain pastures,
Marched his army towards Sutjeska,
Hoping there to meet the Albanians,
Lounging half-asleep and drowsy.
How their eyes would swiftly open
Seeing Montenegro's army!
They would wonder how he'd got there,
They would marvel and be dazzled,
From the rear he would attack them,
Overwhelm Albania's army,
In split seconds, as an eagle
Seizes from aloft a rabbit
Sitting, hiding in the brambles.
In a net he would then snare them,
All the Albanians in a circle,
Just like chubs and eels and gudgeons,
He would capture them all living,
Not let one of them elude him,
Let none notify Albania
What an outrage Montenegro
Had let loose upon their people,
When he seized Plava, Gucia,
Lined his prisoners up before him,
Drove them sheep-like o'er the mountains,
Slaves and serfs for Prince Nikolla,
All the greater'd be the insult.
Yet, the moment when that hero
Rode off mounted on his courser,
Did he hear the high peaks roaring,
Heard the firing down in Nokshiq,
Wrenched his feet out of the stirrups,
Was astonished, he was staggered,
Galloped up to find a lookout
To a cliff-side point of vantage,
There to survey with his field glass
All the scenery around him,
And he saw Albanian forces

Fast arriving from Sutjeska,
Saw their felt caps whiten Nokshiq,
Viewed Albanian vim and volleys
As they galloped into battle,
In the sunshine gleamed their sabres,
Beheld bodies of the fighters
Lying dead around the farmhouse
Of Curr Ula. With his hands he
Clapped his thighs and like a mad bull
Charging o'er the fields, a-driven,
Bellowed loudly as he could, and
Summoned Mirko, daunting fighter,
In his heavy cloak, the captain,
Well-known as a noble marksman:
"Where've you been, good Captain Mirko,
Can't you see someone's betrayed us?
Take away his patch of sunlight!
Unannounced and unexpected,
Have the Albanians now descended,
Wearing cowls and wearing jackets,
In a horde upon Sutjeska
And on Nokshiq in the gorge there,
Swarming like the gnats 'round tree trunks.
Take, oh Mirko, some battalions,
Seize all you can find, good fellow,
Men who know no word of honour,
Scurry with them down the mountain,
Hasten forth and save our army,
All distracted by the booty.
For, if what I see is truthful,
We are heading for disaster."
How the bugles loudly blasted!
How the drums and trumpets echoed!
All the soldiers seized their weapons,
Stuffed their bags with bread and biscuits.
Cannons were set up, and mortars
On the mountain ridge o'er Nokshiq,
All the captains and commanders
Put their swords and bayonets on.
As in autumn after rainstorms,
When the soil is drenched and sodden,
And a chunk of granite breaks off

From the cliff and starts to tumble
In a landslide down the valley,
Rumbling loudly like an earthquake,
Thus the sombre forest echoed,
You'd have thought the Highlands thundered,
When the hordes of Mark Milani
Set off marching down the mountain,
Strode behind that Captain Mirko,
Down to storm the Albanian army.
God in heaven, be my witness,
When the *shkjas* and the Albanians
Met, when fire and powder mingled,
Born they were to slay each other,
How the battle raged, what havoc,
How the *hutas* and *novicas*
Echoed in the din and clamour.
Meshed were white felt caps, *kapicas*,
With the belching of the big guns,
Cannonballs spat sparks and fire,
Mount Trojani in the distance
Groaned, and Metohija grumbled,
Underfoot the earth did tremble,
Clouds of dust did upwards billow,
Mist and pall bedimmed the heavens,
None could peer at, make out Nokshiq!

Canto 24

THE ZANA OF MOUNT VIZITOR

The Great *Zana* observes the bloody fighting from her position atop Mount Vizitor, high above the town of Plava, just as Zeus once looked down upon the Trojan War from lofty Mount Ida. Outraged to see the murder of the virtuous Tringa, who as a child had been in the protection of the mountain spirits, she descends to fetch the body and brings it back to the alpine pastures of Mount Vizitor. There the corpse of Tringa is ceremoniously washed, clothed and buried at the foot of a linden tree as the Great *Zana* laments her in a funerary chant. Tringa's death must be avenged. Such is the will of the Great *Zana,* who then takes flight over the Albanian Highlands to call upon all good men to hasten to the battlefield of Nokshiq. Storm clouds gather on the horizon as the warriors of the tribes of Shala, Shoshi, Shllaku, Temali, Merturi, Gjani and Dushmani prepare for battle.

As in Nokshiq war was raging,
Vizitor's Great *Zana* came out
Onto a high promontory
Where the Good One paused observing.
There upon the slopes of Nokshiq,
Hutas and *novicas* firing,
Sabres flashing in the sunshine,
Wild Albanians, Montenegrins
Grappled, fought with one another.
Band of heroes were the former,
Yet five hundred years they served the
Sultan in Stamboul, by God, yes,
Never did they lay their guns down,
Always lived free in the mountains,
Like the bent-beaked highland eagles,
While the Serbs, that race pugnacious,
With the Turks did make alliance,
Stood before them straight, saluting,
Gave unto the Turks their greetings,
To the Turks paid tithes and taxes,
Were five hundred years their servants.
Transfixed was the Earthly Beauty
On that rugged promontory,

Staring keenly all around her,
Eyes on fire like the sunlight,
Studied, surveyed all the action,
Who appeared to be best marksman,
Whose grim sabre gleamed the brightest,
Who advanced and who retreated,
Who were wildest in attacking,
Montenegrins or Albanians.
Pondered, seemingly, in anger
For it seemed to her that none did
Care a bit for their existence
Even though life can be pleasing.
Now her glance turned, concentrated
On the farmhouse of Curr Ula.
There she saw poor Tringa supine,
Stretched out, sprawling, o'er the courtyard,
In a pool of blood, her severed
Head lay right beside the doorway.
Yes, the Good One had for ages
Known that maiden, wretched Tringa,
From the time she was an infant,
When upon her brow the locks hung,
As she spent among the lambkins
Her siesta, heat evading,
In the shade of Vizitor while
Knitting socks, and with her girlfriends
Danced and frolicked in the shadows,
Practising (how short her life was!)
How she'd dance once she was married,
Prance with all the other women
In the pastures of the Highlands.
With a kerchief o'er her eyebrow,
She'd pretend she was in mourning
For some lamb or tree trunk lying
There before her, sobbing, weeping,
So that she would know, when married,
How to mourn those valiant heroes,
Who defended tribal honour,
In some court case, arbitration,
Giving visitors a welcome,
Keeping faith and manly custom,
With their wisdom and their courage,

Killed, with Turks and *shkjas* in battle.
Sometimes at a spring of water
Or an icy mountain torrent,
They'd lie with the herds, reposing,
Or like little larks a-flitting,
Teasing gently one another.
With their palms they'd flick the water,
Swishing, spraying one another,
Or with tiny toes go wading,
Springing on another's back or
Hopping up and down the hillside,
Spend their time in childish pranks while
With their herds in summer pasture.
There above them, the Great *Zana*,
Hiding in a tree-fork hollow
'mongst the firs, or in a cavern
Carved by lightning from a cliff side,
Would recline and gaze upon them
With her other fairy sisters,
With those lovely *shtozovalles*,
Vizitor's *oras* and *zanas*
Talking 'mongst themselves and giggling
At their games and childish pleasures,
Simple joys and entertainment.
On occasion would some maiden
Tringa's face douse well with water,
While she, sleeves rolled up, bare-headed,
Stood there laughing, making merry.
Like the nightingale when chirping,
She would stand there, face all dripping,
In the silv'ry shining water,
Like a rosebud drenched in dewdrops
In the dawn of early morning.
She'd then fill her mouth with water,
Spew it out at her companion,
Chasing her across the meadow,
Like two butterflies albescent.
Thus was the Great *Zana* watching
Little Tringa, spry and lively,
Fresh and candid like the springtime.
How the Earthly Beauty loved her,
Took in her great satisfaction.

Turning to the *shtozovalles*,
All those fairies, speaking to them,
Did the Good One so address them:
"Dapple-eyed ones, listen to me,
Slender sprouts grown 'mongst the apples,
By the Lord of clouds and sunshine,
Have you e'er seen such a creature
In the sun or in the moonlight,
Such a graceful maid as Tringa,
Daughter she of Ulë Keqota,
Valiant hero, noble host he,
Man renowned in the Great Mountains?
Study (may the fates safeguard her)
How she moves and toddles after
Other maidens in the meadows,
Star-like on clear nights in summer,
Like a comet 'cross the heavens,
With a tail of light behind it."
"Well indeed have you described her,"
Then replied one of the *oras*:
"May the Evil Eye ne'er glimpse her,
For, by God, she does resemble
With her form, a sprouting fir tree,
With those eyebrows, willow branches,
With her eyes, the pips of cherries,
With her teeth, white stones in gravel
When the sun shines after rainstorms.
One more thing she does resemble,
Dewdrops caught on lily petals
By the early light of morning.
God preserve her for her mother,
When she grows she'll be a beauty,
Fairer she than all the maidens
In the Highlands, Shllaku, Shala."
How the Earthly Beauty was
Delighted at the *ora*'s answer.
With a smile upon her lips, the
Good One turned to her, responding:
"Thus, good *oras* and good *zanas*,
Tringa keep in your affection,
Love that maiden, take care of her,
Guard her as you would your eyesight.

When she comes to spend the summer
Here on Vizitor's fine pastures,
Do not let the witches touch her,
Let no Evil Eye befall her,
Let no witchcraft make her tumble,
Keep away from her the wolf pack,
Give her shade in noonday heat and
Turn her winters into summers,
Keep her robust, ever blooming,
Like the sweet buds in the springtime,
For the Lord made her a flower.
Since that day I first espied her
On the banks of the Gradina,
Wat'ring lambs, her face refreshing,
Did she steal my heart forever,
And I love her, God's my witness,
Cherish her like my own eyesight."
And indeed did the Great *Zana*
Give to Tringa her protection
When she reached the mountain pastures,
Watched her coming and her going,
Ever by her side remaining,
That no evil dare approach her,
Like an elder sister renders
Safety to a younger sibling.
When dark clouds the heavens covered,
And a bolt of lightning flashed and
Hit a high and wide-branched linden
Under which had taken cover
From the fury of the rainstorm
Little Tringa, in an instant
Did the lovely *zana* hasten
To her, and did stretch her mighty
Hand, the Good One, thus deflecting
Far that bolt of lightning from her,
Made it strike in rocky wasteland.
When a wolf poached Tringa's lambkins,
Was it not to take possession,
Steal, as men do, sheep for riches,
Men who prey upon the weaker
Of their fellows, savage species,
Callously and cruelly killing,

Squeezing out their souls in fighting,
Not for other men's salvation,
But to simply take possession,
Stuff more fat into their stomachs.
Weakened in the wilds of winter,
Belly flattened like a pancake,
Thin hide from its spine a-drooping,
Did the wolf have no choice but to
Set upon poor Tringa's lambkins,
If it hoped to keep on living.
Up against it flew the *zana*,
Closed its hungry mouth so it could
Not assail poor Tringa's lambkins,
And the wolf, although still starving,
Hung its head, did leave unsated,
Tail between its legs, not causing
Any harm to Tringa's lambkins,
You'd have thought it were a sheepdog,
Guarding all the lambs with Tringa.
So the *zana*, may she prosper,
Loved and cherished little Tringa,
Wretched Tringa who'd been slain by
Vasil Ndreka, eyes a-goggle.
Thus when on that promontory
Sitting up, the Good One noticed
How in Nokshiq war was raging,
She surveyed Curr Ula's courtyard
And beheld what she had dreaded,
Had her eyesight but been weaker!
Saw her Tringa dead and lifeless,
Lying stretched across the courtyard,
Severed head beside the doorway
In a pool of blood, and shuddered.
Down her spine did run the shivers.
Yes, the Good One could not fathom,
Not accept that something evil
Could occur and strike her Tringa.
To her sight she gave no credence,
And her hand, as fair as sunshine,
Did she place upon her eyebrow,
Stood up straight upon the cliff side,
Up and down her head a-bobbing,

Raised her eyebrows, bolts of lightning,
Lowered then her lids in sorrow,
Like a mother when she learns
The foe has slain her son in battle,
In the Highlands or the lowlands,
Or some other peril's struck him.
When the others bring the message,
Not to break her heart in pieces,
With a vague word or a "maybe."
To her feet will rise the mother
At the news and set off running,
But her aged legs won't bear her.
Thus in anguish she starts hoping
It won't be her son who's perished,
It will be another fighter
Who perchance holds the same surname.
She refuses to imagine
That her son could be in danger.
When she nears the sad location
And she sees her son has fallen,
With an "ah" she gives a whimper,
Beats her head, that withered widow,
Pain within her heart a-welling.
So it was with the fair *zana*,
When she saw that Tringa'd perished.
From the lofty promontory
Did the Good One like an arrow
Shoot into the air, a-soaring,
On her golden wings descended,
As a pigeon plummets to a
Threshing field for grain, she sped fast
To the courtyard of Curr Ula,
Curr lay dead beside the chimney,
In the courtyard sprawled his sister.
As a mother, when at night
Her children at the hearth are dozing,
Hugs them in her arms and bears them,
Cuddled, off to bed for sleeping,
So the *zana* fondled Tringa,
In her warm embrace, caressing,
Petted, coaxed her head with care and
In her snow-white arms she held her,

Being rocked to sleep, you'd think her.
To her breast the Earthly Beauty
Clasped the corpse, a-flying upwards
To the heavens, through the shooting,
Through the cannonballs and bullets,
Flew to Vizitor, that mountain,
Where she gently laid the body.
On that mountain pass, a pasture
Stretched beside a pine-tree forest,
Stone-throw wide did span the meadow,
Full of verdure and young flowers.
In the middle of the meadow
There arose a lofty boulder,
At its foot an icy spring flowed,
Cold spring water coursed enough
To keep a millstone turning, milling.
There the *oras* and the *zanas,*
All assembled, took refreshment
In the moonlight bathing, and did
Join their hands to form a ring dance.
There they frolicked and made merry,
There waxed joyful with their singing,
Waltzing, sang to one another
With the nightingales in summer
'til the dawn rose in the morning.
May she revel e'er in goodness,
The Great *Zana*, God preserve her,
At that spring and on that meadow!
In the fresh grass she laid Tringa,
Mourning for her and lamenting.
When the *zana* finished keening,
Did she let a piercing scream out,
How Vizitor's pastures echoed!
All her fellow sisters heard it,
All the *oras* and the *zanas*,
Hearkened from their dwelling places,
Caves of refuge on Vizitor,
On Vizitor's mountain scattered
In amongst the cliffs and gorges,
Whence the Blithe Ones watched the battle.
How they flashed like lightning, flying,
Some alone and in hosts others,

Soaring, with their wings a-beating,
Like the pigeons in the evening
Just before the sun is setting,
Scattered, cooing under rooftops,
When they hear their mistress calling,
Coaxing, luring them with grain seed,
To the garden or the courtyard,
Soar alone or all together,
Beckoned by the voice that bids them.
Like them dauntless did the Blithe Ones
Chatter, laugh with one another
As they made their way a-winging.
Yet, when they got to the meadow,
In the fresh grass did they notice
Wretched Tringa's lifeless body.
"Kuku" did they lament loudly,
Scratched their cheeks and flayed their faces,
Tore their silken hair to pieces,
Sobbed and wept with one another,
Moaning, groaning, all in anguish,
Hurled themselves upon the body,
Blood dripped from their hearts in sorrow.
"Maidens, cease now, stop your weeping!
We will yet have time for mourning,"
Scolded, ordered the Great *Zana*,
"For we've gathered at this venue
Where the grass with tears is watered,
Where the soil is drenched in blood, in
Human blood, and where before us
These Albanian men and women,
Whom we *oras, zanas* cherish,
Always struggled, always suffered
Endless trial and tribulation,
For that land, that poor Albania,
Has as neighbour a black devil,
And its breast is even blacker,
Has as neighbour Montenegro.
In its niche a Turk has nested,
Who there by his very presence
Veils the sun with sombre shadow,
With his glance the earth he poisons,
As a rattlesnake is wont to.

Let us leave such matters now, for
Tringa's body must be readied,
Must be washed and cleansed to start with,
Secondly we need some garments,
Need to dig a grave, too, for her.
As to washing, I will do it,
But we have no clothes, so listen:
Jere, Lere, Tere, Gere,
You, Culina and Dalina,
Tile, Gile, Tale, Gale,
Go with Done and Berdona,
Beke, Çeke and Cerrleka,
Swiftly fetch a snow-white blouse and
Find a robe for her interment
Like those worn by Highland maidens,
And you, Care, Nare, Dare,
Find a broad and bright-bleached head scarf,
Stitch upon it tender sun rays
And as best you can, embroider,
In it we'll her head envelop.
You, Fatale, Naze, Raze,
Fashion fast a golden necklace
Decked with writing, saints and flowers,
Blessed signs of human comfort,
Like the one that she was wearing,
And a pair of golden bracelets,
Put the necklace on the poor lass."
In a flash the *shtozovalles*
Vanished, off to do their duties
And perform them to perfection
As had ordered the Great *Zana*.
Once again the Earthly Beauty
Turned and let a piercing scream out,
Far it rang to Metohija.
Deep from in the fir-wood forest
Did two dark-grey wolves come running.
To that meadow did they hurry,
Saw before them the Great *Zana*.
Swiftly down the hillside racing,
Back and forth their tails were wagging,
Right down to her did they hasten,
Looking like two harmless house dogs,

Tamely nearing her, approaching,
Springing back and forth around her,
Full of merriment and longing,
Licking at her feet and fingers,
Lapped her face while on their hind legs.
Then the two wolves in her presence
Squatted on the ground before her,
Ears all pricked up, tongues a-panting,
With their eyes they watched her closely,
Waiting, both the wolves, before her,
For the orders she would give them,
Having summoned them so loudly.
And the Good One, tears a-streaming,
Took them with her to the place where
On the south side of the boulder,
Tringa's grave was for the digging.
There, the two wolves with their haunches,
With their sharpened claws all ready,
Set out right away and dug a
Grave, waist-deep, to bury Tringa.
Then arrived the *oras, zanas*,
Bringing clothes for her interment,
Flayed the flax and wove the garments,
Cut and stitched and ornamented
As but *zanas* can embroider,
Naze, Raze and Fatale
Brought with them a golden necklace
And a pair of precious bracelets,
Molten gold, thick as a finger,
On one side the Heart of Jesus,
Saint Anthony on the other,
Clasping in his hand a lily,
Finely wrought and well-designed just
As the Great *Zana*'d commanded.
Then the greatest of the *zanas*
In the Highlands and the lowlands,
God preserve her, sat by Tringa,
Washed the body, using soapwort
And spring water, where was wont to
Bathe the Good One in the moonlight.
All the leading and high-ranking
Oras and the *zanas* helped her.

All the others formed a circle,
Tearful cheeks and hair dishevelled,
Some were standing, others kneeling
In the meadow, clasped their fingers,
Leaning gently on their sisters,
Sobbing, mourning in such anguish
Wretched Tringa. Now the smallest,
Little Dardhamoskadele,
Who'd been Tringa's boon companion,
To one side went, and the fairy
Leaned her shoulder 'gainst the rock face,
Sobbing, weeping and lamenting,
Mourned her, yes, her heart was broken.
Then two of the other sisters,
Stroked her hair and, taking pity,
Placed her head under their shoulders,
Dried her tears with thin-spun kerchiefs,
Gave her apples and strawberries,
Doing what they could to comfort
Little Dardhamoskadele.
Ballehana, Shtatzarana,
With Shtrumore and Vathnore,
Wandered out to pluck some flowers
There in Tringa's tomb to scatter,
That she ever bide on blossoms.
Then came Syne, Lore, Loshe,
Mine, Mile, Mele, Groshe
Bearing with them in their hands a
Slate of marble, smooth and polished,
Long and wide, the grave to measure.
On the walls of stone they placed it
In the hole so heavy soil would
Ne'er press on the face of Tringa.
Off to one side, in the distance,
Now the wolves took up position,
Resting on their haunches, howling,
Whining softly, never stopping.
Summer's bird perched in an oak tree
Rooted firmly on that boulder,
Chirped and sobbed up in the branches,
Ne'er fell silent, there unceasing,
Thinking not of food and water,

Was intent to give support to
The Great *Zana* in her keening,
Wanted long to grieve poor Tringa,
Slain by godless Vasil Ndreka
In the blossom of her youth, and
From this world exiled forever.
With her sleeves rolled, the Great *Zana*,
With a towel 'round her shoulders,
Washed the body of poor Tringa
With her tears and with spring water,
Well she rinsed it, well she mourned her,
That the rocks and trees took pity:
"Are you angry at me, Tringa
That your eyes will not look at me,
That you smile not, nor address me,
Oh, my amulet, my sunshine,
Breaking with your rays through darkness,
Why are you so bitter with me?
Never without you was springtime,
Never without you sweet flowers,
Never songs and never dancing,
Cold spring water to refresh me,
Never have my eyes shone, sparkled,
Look at me, you are my eyesight!
What's this sombre shadow o'er you?
Can't you see who's here to wash you?
Cleansing you is the Great *Zana*,
Could I perish at this hour!
Washing you with cold spring water,
With my tears from dripping eyelids.
When you climbed the mountain pastures,
I was always, ever, with you,
With you e'er in Highlands, lowlands,
Like the moon, the stars' companion,
When the sunshine fades at twilight.
Don't you know, my dark-eyed cherry,
How we played when you were little,
When your hair had curly ringlets,
Spent siestas both together,
Under Mount Vizitor's shadow,
How I feigned another maiden,
Played a cousin, your companion,

Taught you how to knit your stockings,
How to sew and to embroider?
Deep within a shady fir grove
Did a bird of summer chatter,
Sweetly chirping, brightly singing,
As this bird alone is wont to.
More than once you begged and pleaded
That I snare the birdlet for you,
That I catch the little warbler,
Place it in your hands so gently,
Since you were convinced that bird would
Go on singing after capture.
You were not aware a bird will
Never sing when made a prisoner.
Come, make peace with me, my Tringa,
Speak and let me see you laughing,
Speak and laugh as we were wont to,
For the vernal season's nearing,
Trees and flowers are in blossom,
And the mountain snow has melted.
Soon the torrents will be flowing,
Soon that summer bird will sing forth.
Now the herds have come a-grazing,
Now the flutes and pipes are playing,
Now the cattle bells are ringing,
Shepherds, shepherdesses singing,
Cheeks all red like pomegranates,
Hand in hand we two will wander,
Hand in hand, as white as snowflakes,
Shuffle through the shady pastures,
Take refreshment in spring waters,
In the shade we'll pluck fresh flowers,
Pick strawberries, pears and apples,
Gather lilies and carnations,
Fill our baskets up with roses,
Milk and snow for lunch and dinner,
Milk and snow we'll have for breakfast,
Full of health, like frosty meadows,
Robust minds and heart will give us
Peace with God and fellow beings.
In our fair Albanian tongue we'll,
Under oak or under pear tree,

Sing, both you and I together,
Like that bird of summer trilling,
'Oh, my rose, so white and lovely!'
Piteous Tringa, what's before me?
Would I had no eyes to see you,
What's that mark upon your forehead,
Which my eyes can but interpret
As some swarthy monster, vampire,
Like the ones which blot the moon out?
'Kuku!' I'm a wretched tree stump,
For that mark was rifle-fashioned,
Bullet shot into her forehead,
Through the brow of this fair maiden,
Where the soul is in most torment.
Yes, alas, they've slain my Tringa!
Killed my Tringa, God confound them!
Made her wilt, that poor young maiden,
Made her blind and made her wither,
Veiled her folk and tribe in mourning,
Made lament her friends, godparents.
Oras, zanas, shtozovalles,
You are orphaned and afflicted,
All of you, where'er you're dwelling,
Qafa e Diellit, Peak of Muzheli,
No more will we, gentle sisters,
Have to look out for our Tringa,
Have to watch where she is going,
Have to search the mountain pastures,
Have to summon o'er the hillsides,
For that maiden never more will
Cast upon this earth her shadow,
Underground will she be rotting.
When in wintertime the skies are
Blue and cleared of heavy rain clouds,
When the sun shines on the coastline,
Will emerge the Ocean Beauties
From the sea onto the beaches,
There, where Tringa in the winter
Grazed her herds, they'll be resplendent,
Singing, dancing, making merry.
They will gaze about, the Good Ones,
Look around to find their Tringa,

See her put her lambs to pasture,
In their hearts they'll cherish Tringa.
They'll inquire of one another,
Why their Tringa is not present.
Has she gone to other pastures
With her herds for winter grazing?
Then a seagull will inform them:
'Ocean Beauties, do not bother
Searching, looking out for Tringa,
She this winter will be spending
On Vizitor's mountain pastures,
At a spring, under a linden,
In a grave she will be lying,
Will be feeding whip snakes, vipers.'
Time goes by and seasons pass,
Again the tribal feast will near, and
To the farmhouse of Curr Ula
Will godfathers, friends be coming,
Will godmothers, girlfriends gather,
As they every year are wont to.
When they see the hearth extinguished,
See the door closed, barred with nettles,
They will go and ask the neighbours:
'Greetings, may you have good weather,
Has Curr Ula emigrated?
What of Tringa, is she married?'
'Gentlemen, may fate be with you,
May good luck be with you, ladies,
That your father's friends you visit,'
Will the neighbours kindly answer,
'For, alas, Curr Ula's perished,
Tringa, yes, she now is married,
With the black soil is she wedded
Up at Vizitor's green linden,
A *shkja* slew her, God confound him!
While in Nokshiq war was raging.'
Oh, my Tringa, how I mourn you!"
At this, fainted the Great *Zana,*
And her face fell onto Tringa's.
Then the *oras* and the *zanas*
All at once did let a scream out,
How Trojani's pastures echoed,

Iron Peak, Vermosh resounded,
As did Mokra e Shekullarit.
Both wild wolves began a-wailing,
Tears were streaming down their faces.
From a treetop on the cliff side
Did the bird of summer plummet,
Dead, its heart was broken, and the
Icy spring with blood did burgeon.
Perched atop a boulder's tip
Upon Trojani's mountain pastures
Sat a white *ora* observing
With her sisters all the fighting,
All the warfare down in Nokshiq,
Heard the shrieking and the moaning,
Heard the *oras* and the *zanas*
On Vizitor's mountain meadows.
Hearing, did she understand that
Maybe Vizitor's Great *Zana*,
Slender figure, raised in orchards,
And her flaxen-haired sprite sisters,
May the Lord increase their dance, had
Happened on a fateful pathway.
Thus she said to her companions:
"Listen, sisters, do I beg you,
All that shrieking and that moaning
Which is spewing from Vizitor
Does not sound like jubilation,
Rather seems a sign of sorrow,
Grief and sombre lamentation.
It might be a good idea
That we hasten to Vizitor,
That we find out what has happened,
And how fare our distant sisters."
Thus the Good Ones, may God bless them,
Soared into the air together,
Beating golden wings and gliding,
Flew to Vizitor's high pastures.
In a flash the gilded feathers
Fluttered to that mountain venue,
Like some eagles, flexed their clutches,
When they, searching from the heavens,
Zoom past thickets and o'er clearings,

Down to pluck their prey, the victims.
Thus the Earthly Beauties hovered,
Circled Vizitor's high pastures,
Scanning with their eyes to see if
They could spy the *oras, zanas*.
There, the eyes of the Great *Ora*
Focused on a meadow, where the
Fairies, all the *shtozovalles,*
Stood on Vizitor's great pasture
In a circle, there surrounding
Tringa's body. Cheeks a-scratching,
Hair a-tearing, the Great *Zana*
Patted Tringa's face so gently,
Sobbed and moaned, to tears she melted.
Arrow-like, the Earthly Beauties
To that pasture plunged and landed,
Brought a breeze with wings a-beating,
When descending from their journey,
They caused beech-tree leaves to quiver.
When they lit upon that meadow,
Did they see the *zanas* weeping,
Saw them sobbing, cheeks a-scratching,
Saw bent over, the Great *Zana,*
Over Tringa, gently stroking.
How the Good Ones there were staggered,
How they grieved and how lamented,
Down their faces tears were streaming.
The Great *Ora* of Trojani
Reigned like first rays in the morning,
And a star shone on her forehead,
Down her back did flow and tumble
Locks of silken hair, all wavy,
Flowing were her snow-white garments,
From her flight on high they fluttered,
Shining like the sun at noonday,
'neath her breasts a golden waistband,
On her feet were gilded sandals,
Like a full moon in the heavens
On a summer evening glowing.
Silver did her forehead shimmer
Over eyebrows, as a mountain
Over pathways shines in splendour

Midst the stars up in the cosmos.
Thus majestic stood the Good One
On the meadow strewn with flowers,
Treading lightly, steps well measured,
Skirting petals of the lilies,
That she not tread on the blossoms,
Roundabout did she proceed and
Make her way to the Great *Zana*,
Placed her arms under her shoulders,
Pulled her to her feet, and with her
Left arm, creamy-hued like ivory,
Wrapped around her thighs fresh lilies.
Tightly did she hold the *zana*,
Pressed her to her breast so gently.
With the other hand, the Beauty
Dressed her hair o'er brow and temples,
With great care did she arrange it
In a kerchief, then said to her,
While the tears her cheeks were drenching:
"Come, good sister, be now stoic,
You are such a valiant woman,
For you're thus, and God's my witness,
Only doing yourself damage.
Come now, be steadfast, my sister,
It will be your death, this weeping."
The Great *Zana*, head now leaning
In the white arms of her sister,
Sobbing, whining in affliction,
Broken words used as an answer:
"Such misfortune's struck me, sister,
That I've nothing more to live for,
For they've slain my dearest Tringa,
Withered her in youth and blossom,
Both my eyes have now been blinded,
Burnt to ashes all my pastures,
Poisoned are the creeks and torrents.
I can no more join the dancing,
Never will I bathe in fountains,
I've no need of shady places,
I've no need of fresh spring water,
No need to pluck lilies, roses,
Chase the butterflies o'er meadows,

Follow ladybirds and glow worms,
Or to nightingales' songs hearken.
May these pleasures ever vanish,
May there be no singing, dancing,
May there return no more springtimes,
Now that wretched Tringa's slaughtered,
Whom above all else I longed for,
May a bolt of lightning fell me."
Once more shrieked the *oras, zanas,*
Once more wolves began their howling,
Lofty pastures, mountains echoed.
With her hand did the White *Ora*
Stroke her face and wipe her tears off,
Blot them gently with her kerchief,
As she sweetly gave this answer:
"No, my dear beloved sunshine,
No, my fairest honey-blossom,
Your dear Tringa has not perished,
Has not died, I swear by summer,
By the dew that drips at daylight,
When the sun beams o'er the mountains.
She's not dead, she's born again now
For a second time in Nokshiq,
Paid due honour to her country.
When this morn, before the dawning,
Rifles echoed down in Nokshiq,
And the *shkjas* began their burning,
Set out slaughtering and seizing
Sheep and goats and cows and oxen,
As has ever been their custom,
All surviving kith and kin did
Take flight o'er the fields and meadows,
Running swiftly towards Sutjeska,
None remained on tribal land there,
Only Tringa with her brother,
With Curr Ula, stretched out dying,
In the throes of death he lay there.
All around the lands of Nokshiq
Sounded rifles, ever firing,
All in flames were barns and houses,
Burning smoke befouled the heavens
That you could not see around you.

All the Slavic men and women
Hurled like wolf packs in the winter,
While they plundered and marauded,
Slaying elders, women, children.
Yet, this noble maiden, Tringa,
Daughter she of Ulë Keqota,
Did not leave behind her brother,
'til he closed his eyes and passed on.
When she saw her brother perish,
She perceived a *shkja* was coming
To the farmhouse, and reacted!
To her feet did then leap Tringa.
There upon her brother's body
Did the maiden take an oath, yes,
Swore by God (and praise be to Him!)
That she'd not alive be captured,
Not dishonour father, mother,
Put to shame not her dead brother,
Not infringe on tribal honour.
Thus she seized her brother's *huta*,
To the courtyard did she hasten,
Saw that hothead *shkja* approaching,
Saw him coming, planning evil,
Even worse would be his deed to
Send her to his home as servant.
When that dog, son of a bitch, stormed
Towards the fair maid to enslave her,
Tringa instantly made ready,
Fired her *huta*, falcon maiden.
In the chest she shot and killed him,
To the ground he reeled and tumbled,
Then the *shkjas* did slaughter Tringa.
Zana, you've no call for crying,
For that valiant Highland maiden
Held out like all noble women,
Living, did not leave her brother,
Living, was not taken, captured,
And herself she vindicated
Like the best man in the Highlands,
Shamed not ancestors, descendants,
Rendered glory to Albania.
One day songs will be sung of her,

Where the Albanian tongue is spoken,
This divine and potent language.
She'll be hailed by all the heroes
For her actions, valiant maiden,
Tringa, Ulë Keqota's daughter,
While the battle raged in Nokshiq.
Long as sun shines on the planet,
Tringa's name will be remembered!"
What to her said the Great *Zana*?
"*Ora*, may you thrive like mountains,
Dear one, fed on dew from heaven,
Dear one, girthed with lily petals,
By the sun's warm rays ennobled,
Like the stars your eyes do sparkle
When you open, when you close them,
Like the moonlight in the forest,
How you've, loved one, quenched my spirit,
How you've healed my heart with balsam,
Tender sprout with slender eyebrows,
For the words of comfort given,
May you thrive and live forever,
For I feel no pain for Tringa,
She was in this life a blossom,
Now she's blooming up in heaven,
She paid honour to the Highlands,
Rendered glory to Albania.
Now, however, noble fairy,
Come and help me clothe the body,
Dress the body, put her belt on,
For her funeral make her ready,
For, good friend, I have no heart to
Swathe her in sepulchral garments.
Oh, Great *Ora*, I did love her,
I above all else adored her."
How well did the *ora* clothe her,
Gentle Tringa now looked lovely,
How the Great *Zana* bewailed her,
And the wolves, God be my witness,
Stood observing her with longing,
As she lay dressed, ornamented
Like the virgins in the Highlands.
With a chain, a golden necklace

Did the Earthly Beauty vest her.
On her heart the Good One placed her
Two palms, one atop the other,
In a cross and, with some prayer beads,
Both her hands bound well together
As two thousand years have taught us,
As we've learned from our forefathers.
Now did Zana, Shtatzarana,
With Shtrumore and Vathnore,
Strew the grave with roses, lilies.
As they got the body ready
To inter it, the Great *Zana*,
Bending down, did kiss and mourn her,
Sobbing, weeping and lamenting.
Then she faltered, hardly breathing.
The White *Ora* of Trojani
Pulled her up from Tringa's body,
Pressed her to her heart and held her.
All the *oras* and the *zanas*
Bore dead Tringa to the grave side,
There interred her with sweet flowers,
Scatt'ring roses. Little *zana*,
Little Dardhamoskadele,
Sobbing, scratched her cheeks, poor maiden,
Went to fetch that bird of summer,
Lying lifeless on the cliff side,
Placed it in the grave with Tringa,
For the wretched lass, while living
Loved that bird of summer fondly.
Then came Syne, Lore, Loshe,
Mine, Mile, Mele, Groshe
Bearing forth the slate of marble.
On the walls of stone they placed it,
Slipped it in the grave upon them.
At a sign from the Great *Ora*,
Swiftly did the wolves take over,
Set to digging with their haunches,
Filled with earth the hole once empty,
While the beasts themselves were weeping.
On that grave, behold, it happened
In the soil the wolves had broken,
That the earth burst forth in flowers,

Flowers candid, white and shining,
Neither heat nor frost could wilt them.
The Great *Ora* of Trojani's
Pastures beckoned to her sisters,
Dapple-eyed one: Bjeshka, Bora,
Thrake, Dake, Vace, Grace,
Lali, Lice, Like, Dike:
"All of you who are my sisters,
Hasten back to Mount Trojani,
Pluck the linden from the meadow
Where Muç Hasi's herds do slumber,
Bring the linden back here with you,
Plant the linden at this graveside,
Giving Tringa shade in summer."
In a flash the *oras* set off,
In a dash did they return there,
Almost like two shafts of lightning,
With them brought the shady linden.
In the earth, three paces deep they
Placed it, grieving *shtozovalles*.
So large the transplanted linden,
So far did it cast its shadow,
It had shade for sheep, three hundred.
From the woods a bird of summer
Flew and landed on the linden,
With a voice in lamentation,
Started chirping, began singing,
That your heart would break with sorrow.
Shedding tears did the Great *Zana*
Turn and tell Trojani's *ora*:
"Thanks to you, Trojani's *ora*
And to all of you, her sisters,
That you've come to my assistance
On this sombre day of sorrow,
For I'd almost lost my reason.
Listen to me, *oras, zanas*,
Hear the solemn oath I'm taking:
By the silver rays of moonlight,
By the dewdrops on the meadow,
By the beeches, pines and fir trees,
By the cypresses so shady,
By the springs in crags and gorges,

By the nightingales and lilies,
By my youth and by the summer,
May I never see a springtime,
May I never be called *zana*,
If I don't avenge our Tringa
By the light of dusk tomorrow!
Heads three hundred will I cut off,
Shkjas three hundred I'll take prisoner,
Snatch three thousand brides and maidens,
Yes, three thousand, God's my witness!
Snare three thousand brides and maidens,
Make before their time them widows,
Let them mourn like all the others
In the huts of Montenegro,
Like those black-enveloped bugbears,
For our wretched, poor Albania
Never has she seen the sunlight,
For the *shkja,* perched like a vulture
Overhead, will ne'er shun evil,
Always slinking, stealing, slaying,
Moving landmarks, changing borders,
Shooting shepherds, felling farmers,
Just because these folk are living,
Now they're even killing maidens
Wanting to defend their honour!
Troops they gather, armies muster,
And deploy their rifles, cannons,
Come assaulting our Albania
As if their own land defending,
As if God in heaven gave to
Them, not to us this Albania.
What is more, the kings and sultan
Gathered in Berlin to parley,
Not to change things for the better,
Not to rectify, speak justice,
(Where've they ever spoken justice?)
Cruel and heartless is their spirit,
Source of darkness and imbalance,
They ignore faith and religion,
They care not for honour, fairness,
Heartless send their sons to battle,
To be killed by one another,

For a length of cotton fabric,
Or for food to fill their bellies,
Food they've pilfered from the weakest
Like the wild boars in the cornfields.
All they do is fight and argue
As do whores at winning clients,
Try to get the upper hand to
Tear the soul out of the other.
Savage leaders, now they've given
Leave to Prince Nikolla, damn him,
Leave to turn against Albania,
Down to where the river Drin flows,
Down to Rozafat's great fortress,
Shkodra's pride, Albania's keystone.
But he, by God, will not enter,
With the sons of Castriota.
Never have Albanians bent or
Bowed down to a foreign ruler.
Rather now will Montenegro
Be in ruins (let it tumble)
Than the prince will capture Shkodra.
I myself will hearts a-kindle
'mongst the fighters of the Highlands,
Unleash courage, manly valour,
Rouse, inflame Albanian *besa*,
I will never, this I promise,
Swearing by the earth and oceans,
Make peace with the kings' decision,
I will counter and oppose it,
Will seek vengeance for poor Tringa."
"Well you've spoken, falcon maiden,"
Said the *ora* of Trojani,
"I'll be with you, this I promise
With my sisters here behind me."
Then, the Good Ones set off soaring
Into flight, their wings a-beating.
At the speed of sound they travelled,
Landing on Trojani's pastures.
Swift as lightning, the Great *Zana*
Shot into the air, a-winging,
Landed on the Cape of Broja.
On the Cape of Broja standing,

How she shrieked and screamed out loudly,
Making mountains, pastures echo,
Making tremble plains and valleys,
And the valiant fighters heard her,
All those Lekas of the Highlands,
Heroes, battle was their calling.
Well they hearkened, comprehended
That our army down in Nokshiq
Was in trial and tribulation.
To their feet did leap the heroes,
Girded on their belts and weapons,
Rushed off running down the mountains,
Looked like they were gliding earthwards.
Then to Shala Ridge she hastened.
When on Shala Ridge she landed,
How she shrieked and screamed out loudly,
All of Dukagjini trembled,
All the heroes heard her, Shala,
Shoshi, Shllaku and Temali,
Gjani, Merturi and Dushmani,
Men who e'er hold high the *besa*.
Well they hearkened, comprehended
That our army down in Nokshiq
Was in trial and tribulation.
To their feet did leap the heroes,
Girded on their belts and weapons,
Down the mountainside they hurtled
Like a wolf pack in a snowstorm,
Hooded brows and hands on *hutas*.
Then to Qafa e Diellit she hastened.
When on Qafa e Diellit landed,
How she shrieked and screamed out loudly,
Highlands, lowlands both resounding,
How they echoed, how they trembled,
Peja and Gjakova heard her,
Reka and Rogova listened.
Well they hearkened, comprehended
That our army down in Nokshiq
Was in trial and tribulation.
Reka and Rogova hastened,
Peja and Gjakova followed,
All those heroes, bearing weapons,

Eyes a-glowing, hearts gunpowder,
God in heaven, be my witness!
Nowhere stopping, nowhere resting,
Looked more like a wedding party
Off to fetch a bride, a veiled one,
Than they did for slicing heads off,
Face to face with Montenegro.
Now a storm wind started blowing,
Waves were whitened on the waters,
Black clouds swiftly dimmed the heavens,
From Rumia bolts of lightning,
Thunder muttered in Cetinje.
Soon a downpour will descend and
Swamp the rivers, ponds and marshes.
Wretched those who must tomorrow
Cross on foot those creeks and torrents,
Yes, I fear they'll ne'er traverse them,
Ne'er will wade through all the flooding.

Canto 25

BLOOD VENGEANCE EXACTED

This longest of the cantos, at 1,184 lines, is once again devoted to the savagery of battle. From her seat on lofty Mount Durmitor, the *Ora* of Montenegro hears the piercing battle cry of the Great *Zana* of Vizitor and sets off to warn Mark Milani. The *ora* appears to Mark Milani in the form of the Montenegrin epic poet Petar Njegosh to announce that the Albanians are about to descend upon Nokshiq and to exhort him to battle. The valiant Mark Milani makes one last unsuccessful bid to conquer the Albanian Highlands. He calls upon his warriors to attack, promising them breakfast in Plava, lunch in Gucia, tea in Hoti and supper in Shkodra. The battle rages and is portrayed in all its heroic and gory detail. The spirits of the mountains, like the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, intervene to protect their favourite warriors and to send others to their graves. Mark Milani realizes that the Montenegrins are surrounded and searches in a rainstorm for Captain Mirko to announce their retreat. Mirko is caught by the Albanians at a bridge over the River Lim. Here two witches, riding on sea turtles, assist the Albanian *zana* in overcoming the Montenegrin *ora*. The vanquished *ora* is bound to the linden tree at Tringa's grave and is beaten with a serpent. Vengeance has been exacted.

Loud the Highland pastures rumbled,
Loudly creeks and brooks resounded,
Streams and rills and all the meadows,
When did bellow the Great *Zana*,
Zana she of Mount Vizitor.
How Durmitor's pastures echoed!
Montenegro's savage *ora*,
Slavic spirit, heard the crying
From a distance, on Durmitor.
From a high ridge on the cliff side,
In the rocky, rugged gorges
Where the pine trees sprout from boulders,
Rise like spits that pierce the heavens.
Sitting on them raise and nourish
Eagles, arrow-eyed, their youngsters,
Where she-deer seek shelter midst the
Snows which melt not, snows which linger
'til the feast of Veneranda.
Yes, the *ora* on Durmitor

Heard the shrieking, knew that voice well,
Guessed the game and understood the
Dapple-eyed One of Vizitor
Aimed to wing down to Albania
Like the snowstorms in November,
Soar and call the Highland men to
Rally, help Albania's army
Up in Nokshiq where in volleys,
Rifles, cannons, guns were firing,
Shells and bullets whistled like a
Hailstorm in the north wind beating.
Look and see how she reacted,
She, the Montenegrin *ora*,
Eyebrows plucked and face all scarlet.
Yes, that witch, one eye a-goggle,
Strong, yet lethal like a serpent,
Bringing trouble, e'er deceitful.
From that witch was no salvation
When her brain to rage decided.
When she heard that distant shrieking,
Did her heart now seethe with anger,
Like a beast she sprang and bounded,
Winging through the air and glided
To that peak surmounting Nokshiq
Where, upon the hillside, gathered
All the troops of Montenegro,
Waiting in amongst the thickets,
Poised for Mark Milani's orders,
Summoning those men to swiftly
Storm the battlefield and trenches,
Swarm and slaughter the Albanians,
Slay them, leave behind a bloodbath,
As e'er have *shkjas* and Albanians
Done since tragic fate did pair them,
Placed gunpowder, fire together,
Twined Albania and Montenegro!
Yes, the Montenegrin *ora*
Was indeed a clever fairy.
She feared if she spread her wings out,
Sailed under the clouds aloft, she'd
Be espied by the Great *Zana*,
Slender brows, grown 'mongst the apples,

Be thrown on her back and savaged,
Torn to tatters, picked to pieces,
Should she, flying, chance to meet her.
Thus the Slavic *ora* chose to
Flee the lofty heavens, gliding
Not o'er mountain peaks but rather
Through the gorges, rugged canyons,
Montenegro's rocky landscape,
Hov'ring low o'er creeks and clearings,
Skimming right above the surface,
Like the herons do when hunting
Fish in ponds and lakes and shallows,
Stealthy, silently advancing
'til she finally got to Nokshiq
Where upon the hillside huddled
Like a cloud of lightning waited
Montenegro's army ready,
Poised to hark to Mark Milani
Standing on a lofty boulder,
Watching like a dark-grey eagle
With his field glass how the fighters
Down in Nokshiq, *shkjas* and Albanians,
Sliced the heads off one another,
That you'd think them wood a-chopping.
Then transformed herself the *ora*,
Took the shape of Petar Njegosh,
Bishop he, two spans his whiskers,
From that powder keg Cetinje,
Far and wide a figure famous
In the past and in the present
For his "Mountain Wreath," that epic
Verse of divine inspiration,
Garbed in tears and black gunpowder.
He went up to Mark Milani,
With faint voice did he address him:
"Listen, Mark, for like a windstorm
Have the Highlands set upon you.
Yes, I fear that the Albanians,
Bitter venom, will defeat you,
Don't know if you'll keep your head on.
They are going to crush your army
If you do not get a move on,

For a war cry has been sounded
In the Highlands and the valleys,
O'er the scree and gorges, hailing
Malcija e Madhe, Dukagjini,
To the Drin and Qafa e Diellit,
Peja, Gjakova, Reka, Rogova,
Calling all the finest fighters,
From age seven up to seventy,
To aid the army up in Nokshiq.
When the Albanians heard the war cry,
Old men, young men, children hastened
Some in cowls and some in jackets,
Swarmed like gnats around a tree stump.
By tonight, before the sun sets,
They'll all be here, do believe me.
Listen, don't wait any longer,
Take your army and like lightning
Strike, dispersing the Albanians,
Ere the others come and help them."
Thus the *ora* pleaded with him,
Spoke and vanished in a twinkling.
To his feet sprang Mark Milani,
Hair upon his head was standing,
Like a wild boar's mane a-bristling,
Like a yoke were joined his eyebrows,
Like a steer he roared, proclaiming:
"Rise now, Montenegrin falcons,
If you're really the descendants
Of your fathers, your ancestors,
Who ne'er foreign yoke would suffer,
Never would pay tithes or taxes.
Every time their prince did call them,
Did they storm through fire and water,
Rise now swiftly and make ready,
Fly 'gainst the Albanian army
By tonight, before the sun sets,
And destroy it, taking prisoner
Anyone your thrust surviving,
God be willing, you'll tomorrow
Take your breakfast up in Plava,
Lunch Gucia, tea in Hoti,
Have your supper down in Shkodra,

Right in Rofazat's high fortress,
Rising on that hill, that monster.
For the Seven Kings and sultan
Gave to us in word and writing
All the lands the Drin should bathe, from
Peja's cliffs down to the ocean.
Thus, Albania'll have no master,
From our lands to the Drin river,
But the prince of Montenegro,
Prince Nikolla, glory to him,
For the kings and sultan love him.
Still your women and your children
Languish in their huts, a-starving.
Now it's yours, that land Albania,
All you need to do is seize it.
Rise, good men, be not fainthearted,
Take it into your possession,
Save your kith and kin from hunger!"
Thus bade Mark. The bugles sounded,
Trumpets echoed, drums were beating,
All the soldiers seized their weapons,
Bands, battalions struck out marching,
Led by voyvodes and commanders,
Sabres hanging from their shoulders,
Stretching to their hips, a menace,
Like some serpent thighwards rising.
On the peaks the captains set up
Mortars, muzzle-loading cannons,
Mounted, at the hills directed,
Jaws a-spewing, like *kulshedras*.
Mark Milani his steed mounted,
Huge and oval-skulled, that stallion,
Breast a boulder, long its body,
Straight its rump, its tail all bushy.
Then, with din and clamour like the
Big rocks when they down the hillside
Tumble, setting off a landslide,
When an earthquake roars and rumbles,
So the prince's hordes did hurtle
From the mountains down to Nokshiq,
Like the surge of mighty breakers,
When a cliff or promontory

Plunges to the sea and splashes,
Spreading foaming waves around it,
From the oak-wood forest falling
Down into the salty chasms,
Crushing on its path all objects:
Houses, livestock, living people.
Thus the *shkja*, may his race perish!
Charged o'er hill and vale to battle,
Just as when a house is burning,
Smoke escapes first through the timbers
Of the roof, through beams and trusses,
Then the tips of flames start licking.
When the roof caves in, collapsing,
Do the flames fly to the heavens,
Sparks will soar in all directions,
Smoke and soot will swell in billows,
Rising black into the sky, while
Down within the quicklime oven
Chimney stones explode like chestnuts,
Walls implode. For the beholder
Life itself becomes a torment.
How the people scream and holler,
Scatter, running, some to quench it,
Others strive to save possessions.
Thus the fighting, bloody battle,
Broke out to the cries and keening,
War commenced amidst the clamour,
Roared like thunder in the distance
As the hordes of Mark Milani
Pummelled the Albanian army,
Rifles firing, sabres gleaming,
Cannons belched and spewed in volleys.
"Llesh Nikë Daka, let me ask you,
You who swore that oath so mighty
On Sutjeska's bridge, o'er marshland,
That you'd nine heads slice and slaughter,
That you'd nine *shkja* heads a-capture,
Tell me if in such dire straits you've
Ever been in all your lifetime?"
Said, inquiring, Alush Smajli.
"You know well, Alush," said Llesh, "that
An Albanian, when steel-hearted's

Ne'er in dire straits lest a guest should
Find him with no food to offer,
Lest he have a wife who's lazy,
Homeless offspring, devil neighbour,
Sleepy *ora*, rusty rifle,
Lest bad hands be in his household.
War, however, God's my witness,
Is a cause for celebration.
He is well-versed with gunpowder,
Fears no Seven Kings nor sultan,
Nor the prince of Montenegro.
We've not come to steal and plunder,
But to stop the Slavic onslaught,
Keep the *shkjas* far from our country.
Like a nest of wasps a-buzzing
When a child comes by to prod it,
Will the wasps swarm out to sting it,
Or to wound a hundred children.
Thus the *shkjas* swarm, even thicker,
Bringing with them men and women,
But we'll not give up Albania,
Even if Moscow attacks us,
We'll not dress in their *kapica*."
Llesh Nikë Daka, mighty hero,
Clever man in words and wisdom,
Stood his ground there like a mountain
From the ocean depths emerging,
Which the foaming waves do batter
With their fierce, destructive power.
Thus he stood unmoved, a boulder.
Thus, too, stood Albania's army,
'waiting Montenegro's onslaught.
Here soon was the world a-blazing,
With the rifles ever firing,
Pools of human blood were spreading,
Underfoot the earth did shudder,
When the *shkjas* met the Albanians.
You'd have thought their heads were gourds for
Buying, stacked up in the market.
All entangled did they struggle,
Shooting *hutas* and *novicas*,
Brandishing with rage their sabres,

Wearing white felt caps, *kapicas*,
Some attacked and some retreated,
Some were running, others followed,
Some went uphill, others downhill,
Cursing wildly, sabres chopping,
Midst the carnage and the killing,
Without end the carnage, killing,
Shouting, screaming, loading, firing,
From the hills they called each other,
Screeching, groaning "oh, oh, ah, ah."
Like young foals o'er fields a-driven,
Some were injured, mutilated,
Lay there moaning, others rising,
Bobbing, ducking, while assaulting.
Many lost their ears and noses
On the cliffs amidst the tree trunks.
Dust and smoke then veiled the fighters,
Clouds and billows curling upwards.
In your shirt you'd quiver seeing
Savage sabres gleam, beholding
Captains gone berserk, all frenzied
Like a wolf pack from Peshteri.
How they bawled like steers and bellowed,
Albanian chiefs and standard-bearers!
Splinters flew as bombs exploded,
Bullets whistled o'er the landslides,
So much shouting, so much clamour
Spreading all across the war grounds,
So much screeching to the echo
Of the rifle volleys roaring,
That the cannons when they discharged
Gave off but a deaf'ning rumble,
Like the stones in quicklime ovens
When they burst from heat and fire.
Oh Lord, see them, how they struggled,
Somewhere up there over Nokshiq,
How they strove and how they grappled,
Hoti, Vasoviqi, Gruda!
On both sides were mighty heroes,
In their breasts were three hearts beating.
Many mothers will be weeping,
Many maids'll stay unmarried,

Wives will dress in jet-black garments,
Such cacaphony, commotion,
So much smoke rose to the sky, and
Through that pall the flames were licking!
Frenzied was Çun Mula slaying,
Head scarf skewed, in hand his sabre,
Onwards Hoti, onwards Gruda!
Into battle, valiant heroes.
Like a serpent Hoti struck home,
Gruda launched out with its sabres,
Vasoviq by din was deafened,
Cannons, mortars loudly sounded,
How the fighters pounced and grappled,
How they tore and flayed each other,
Storming, slaying, fleeing, falling,
Failing, dying, reeking, rotting,
Everywhere those fine young heroes,
Both the *shkjas* and the Albanians.
Lofty mountain oak trees mourned them,
Serpents underground took pity!
Lul Rapuka, woodland bear he,
Of the *shkjas* he was a butcher.
When Baca Lucë Deti showed up
Did mourn all the Slavic women.
Where Nikë Gjelosh Luli wandered,
With his teeth he'd bite through iron,
Tree-trunk neck and arms like tie beams,
Did the earth begin to shudder.
Loud did snort Gjeto Mark Ujka,
With such fury did he battle,
Budged not at the Slav invasion,
Stood there steadfast like a rock face.
Alush Smajli from Hoti i Kujit
For the *shkjas* was like a werewolf,
Sabre cleaving as he lunged out,
As if hewing wood on hillsides.
Lulash Nika, in the bushes,
Always Easter, always Bayram,
Called to Islam Makalushi:
"Come on, Islam, let's get going,
In a week, if God be willing,
We'll be entering Cetinje,

Telling tales as once in Tuz and
Getting drunk on all the raki!"
Lulash, also, like an arrow,
Sprang upon the *shkjas*, attacking,
Islam through the *çetas* waded,
In his hand a sabre gleaming,
Maça Grishi, like a dragon,
Leapt and tackled that "Milloshi."
Muzzle-loading cannons could not
Hinder Lucë Gjeloshi's onslaught.
Mighty man, Osman Haxhija,
Voyvode of the tribe of Nokshiq,
With his two eyes like a windstorm,
With his curly, woolly whiskers,
Yes, this mighty hero's busy
With the Montenegrin Cucajs,
Who with rifles, swords and sabres
Caused his tribe much tribulation.
At his side Sadri Mehmeti,
Standard-bearer of the Gashis,
Right behind them Adem Çela,
Carved up *shkjas* like they were mutton,
Jakup Feri, falcon son he,
Fought with Plava and Gucia,
Raged like Mount Peshteri's torrents
When fierce storms and rain have filled them.
What did Bec Patani shout out,
Tall and slender as a flintlock?
"Listen now, Rrushman Hasani,
May that tribe of Zubcis vanish,
For, by God, they're squashing Shkreli,
And they have no lack of bullets,
No one's halting their advancing.
Let's assault them with our sabres!"
To his feet hopped swiftly Rrushman,
Like a vampire from the graveyard,
Quickly he unclasped his sabre,
Flew across Çakorri's landslides,
Like the dark and heavy storm clouds
Scudding, thund'ring from the heavens.
On the *shkjas* did fall the hero,
In his hand his sabre flashing,

Dashed across the scree and landslides,
Making Montenegrins widows,
Shkreli and Zagorja with him,
Known as marksmen, cocky fighters,
With them Ducaj, Xhâj, Bzheta,
Flying at the Zubcis' throats, with
Çul and Bec upon them thumping,
Those Patani lads, like eagles,
How they charged the *shkja* battalions,
Heaving ever-savage sabres.
Gjeto Staka, looming hydra,
Cartridge pouch on one hip girded,
Like the ducks in rushes squawking,
On the River Drin, wings beating,
Did the fighter snort, proceeding,
Off to fight with Montenegro.
Marash Vata, *drangue* hero,
Like a windstorm blew in, rushing,
Those his claws snare will be destined
Ne'er to eat, or drink spring water.
All in flames was Mount Çakorri.
With his sabre now well girded,
Charged Dodë Prêçi, standard-bearer,
With Kastrati, Pjetroshani.
Just as ears of corn bend over
In the fields when crushed and broken
By the wild boars lumb'ring through them,
Hunted by an expert marksman,
So the bands of *shkjas* were sliced up
As Dodë Prêçi waded through them,
And as Gjeto Daka stormed them,
And Voc Keqi, sabre swinging,
All attacking like a hailstorm.
With them noble Vatë Ivani,
Mark Ujkë Vata, Prêlë Ujkë Vata,
Like two bullets in a rifle.
But when Marash Gjeka charged, with
Smajl Mali from Buza e Ujit,
For the *shkjas* 'twas the Grim Reaper
Scything, many men a-slaying.
Tell me though, why has Kelmendi
Put its rifles down, not shooting,

Just as Mark Milani's charging
With the hordes under his orders?
Could it be he's left his post and
Fled while the Albanian army's
Fraught with peril midst the volleys
Of the rifles and the cannons?
No, Kelmendi's not a tribe to
Flee, its sons are mountain eagles.
Every time there was occasion,
As the ancient writings tell us,
With the Turks or *shkjas* to battle,
It among the Seven Kings gained
Fame and made weep Slavic women,
Caused much trouble for the sultan.
Now, one *shkja*, Vuksa' Lekë Drava,
Like a log canoe his body,
Full of cuts and gnarls his head was,
Wounds from sabres, long his form and
Tall, his head reached to the ceiling,
On one cheek a fist-thick swelling,
Drooping eyebrows veiled his vision,
Tailor-made his robes and trousers,
Like the best in Montenegro,
With a kerchief signal-white and
Blood still dripping from his sabre,
O'er his shoulder his *novica*,
He emerged and told Kelmendi:
"Oh Kelmendi, o'er the world you're
Known for battle and for wisdom,
Brimming are your coops and corn cribs,
Has ne'er in your tribe a mother
Given birth to manly hero,
Young, who'd meet me on the war grounds,
Squarely match me with his sabre?"
Guns and rifles all fell silent.
To his feet did jump Prêlë Mema,
He was no imposing figure,
Not for wars and not for weddings,
Skinny fellow, dwarfish body,
Like a tree stump in a canyon.
You would think that monster *shkja* would
Eat him living, two times over.

Prêlë, however, was a wild boar,
Three hearts in him, *zana* hero.
He would flee no brawl or scuffle,
Agile, supple like the rushes,
He came forth the *shkja* to battle.
Vuksa' Leka laughed out loudly:
"By God, good men of Kelmendi,
Why've you placed this wimp before me,
Do you want me to employ him
As a cowherd for my cattle
Back in Palabardhaj? I fear
That this fragile fellow'd rather
Get lost in the thickets, herding.
By Saint Peter of Cetinje,
Even if I stuck my finger
In his mouth, he wouldn't nip me!"
What said Prêlë Mema of Vukli:
"Careful, Vuksan! Like a melon
I'll your head heave in the bushes."
Curled into a ball, Prêlë shot out,
Lunging at the *shkja* with one swoop
Lopped his head off, weighed a bushel,
While *shkjas* and Albanians watched him,
Tossed it off with its *kapica*.
Like a plane tree with its branches
Did the *shkja* to earth a-topple,
Blood did spurt in all directions
As he arms and thighs did wriggle.
To him Prêlë Mema cried, boasting:
"Tell me, Vuksan, whippersnapper,
How much will you pay me now to
Tend your cows in Montenegro?
Watch your step, oh Montenegrin,
Ne'er've you seen a real Albanian,
For this land's a vicious country,
Leave you headless in an instant.
Men aren't judged for their appearance,
But for heartiness and courage.
Speed is measured by one's paces,
That's an adage, you should learn it!"
Mark Milani, when he noticed
Vuksan Leka dead and sprawling,

Was in fury, almost tearful.
In a cawing voice he cried out:
"At them, men! You dogs, where are you?
Filthy swine, you, mangy creatures,
Why're you sitting 'round cross-legged?
Rise now! *Pas vam nanu greba*!"
When an ember in the fireplace
Starts to die down and the log there
Lying crosswise, smokes and hisses,
Will the landlord sit beside it,
Take the tongs or some charred firebrand,
With it will he poke the log and
Then will place around it kindling.
On the side that's started burning,
Sparks will soar around it flying
As he blows upon the coals and
Causes soon a flame to shoot up,
Now the fire's revived, a-flaming.
Thus, at Mark Milani's war cry
Fighting flared up on the war grounds.
Palabardhaj like the mountain
Wolves did set upon Kelmendi.
Blessed God and Lord Almighty,
What a hero, Vllah Serdari!
Flung himself into the foray,
Always first among the fighters.
Mountain passes quaked whenever
Vllah, that savage beast, trod o'er them,
Bloodshot eyes, in hand his sabre,
Like his biceps his thick whiskers.
Like two thunderbolts from storm clouds
Ploughing through the vaults of heaven,
Did two heroes downwards hurtle,
Gjoka Vasa and Kik Mhilli.
Kik Mhilli, noble fellow,
Expert marksman and sword fighter,
Of that noble band a member,
Once did under Captain Mirko
Up in Stolac, Hercegovina,
Slaughter Smajl Aga of Çengiq,
Who with putrid breath and spirit
Hairy, with a hedgehog's body,

From the *rayah* tallied taxes.
With his cane he struck and slew one,
Whipped another in the face and
Tied him with a rope to hang him,
Raped the maidens and their mothers,
And in folk songs is remembered.
What did Tvrdko Stana cry out:
"Please forgive me, mother, father,
For it seems to me unlikely
That I'll e'er return to see you,
Weary is the path I tread on,
Ne'er done battle with such fighters!"
"Udri, Tvrdko, Bog te ubijo!"
Bawled as loud as he was able
Vukotiq Mijo, looking backwards,
As he headed o'er the wasteland.
Rakiq Pera, three hearts in him,
Entered battle, a *kulshedra*,
Never did his pace recede though
Cannons, mortars raged to kill him.
There, too, Pavlo Vuçeniq did
Battle like a living sabre,
Trimmed off many Turkish heads while
War was raging once with Turkey.
Now Gjur Draga wildly lops the
Gnarled pates off of his opponents,
How he chops them with his sabre,
Like a woodsman in a clearing.
Now Turk Shabi speaks imploring:
"Blessed Virgin, Christ, assist me,
Wave on wave the *shkjas* attack us,
Guns in hands, in mouths their sabres."
Who is roaring from that tree trunk
Like a bear from Krrabi's pastures?
Mashi Coku, valiant hero's
Shouting, calling to Turk Shabi:
"To your feet, wild boar, Turk Shabi,
For the *shkjas* us are a-shaming!
No more worth our skulls than sheep heads
'less we stop them with our sabres.
Like a beast Turk Shabi hurtled,
Like a storm Muç Hasi harried.

Such the din and clamour that it
Echoed down to Metohija!
As Mêm Smajli rushed in, taking
Side by side Prêlë Miri with him.
Blood in streams sluiced down the mountain,
To the ground like sacks slumped fighters,
For the blacksmith, who Prêlë Miri's
Sabre fashioned, added to it
Lion's gall and serpent's poison,
Secret magic words he chanted.
Now does Prêlë, by God I tell you,
Every week in Shkodra's centre,
Every week before the elders,
Leave a *shkja* skull as a present.
Dedë Ivani, man from Razna,
Known for speaking and for courage,
Once three horses did leap over,
Horses with tails tied together.
When he all the *shkjas* attacked, did
Montenegro's mountain *ora*
Weep at seeing all the carnage,
Tears of blood her cheeks did cover.
Slavic *ora*, you know well that
Heads will roll across the meadow,
Row on row they will be lolling
When Dedë gets into the foray.
Both Gjokë Marku and Djalë Miri
Every time they wield their sabres,
Candles chill in Montenegro,
Mothers veil themselves in mourning.
Mashi Coku, ox-eyed lad he,
When he canters into battle,
How the *shkjas* begin to quiver,
Like a snake when fire surrounds it.
Shouting, shooting, all the clamour
Echoed up on Mount Çakorri,
Awesomely roared gorges, canyons,
Pernjavori's pastures rang out.
From on high came a battalion,
All young fighters from Bijoca,
Like a landslide down the mountains,
Bearing snow and boulders with it,

Sly combatants, thieves and bandits,
Bitter lads like bottled poison,
Much like whip snakes in the bushes,
Down to skirmish did they hurtle.
When a shepherd by a bonfire
Juniper twigs throws upon it,
Will the flames soar to the heavens,
Thousand sparks to set a-snapping.
Thus the fighting flamed up, raging,
When approached Bijoca's fighters,
Ever closer, ever louder,
Wild, attacking the Albanians.
Yes, my brother, you'd believe me,
Only if you'd come to see it,
Only if you'd come to hear it,
For my tongue cannot express it,
All the noise and all the shouting,
As Albanians, *shkjas* did battle,
Like a hailstorm, bolts of lightning
Pounded all Bijoca's fighters.
Screams of horror there were mixed with
Moaning from the injured, dying,
Curses midst the cries and shrieking
Voiced by fighters in the battle,
How your ears would ring with sorrow,
How your body'd quake and quiver.
Bushes, groves and clearings thudded,
As the cannons roared from hillsides.
Everywhere your glance would wander,
Mountains, valleys, hillsides, passes,
Where you looked 'twas but destruction,
Blood and gore all things did cover.
Lightning strikes were the Albanians,
War is, yes, their skilled profession,
And the band of *shkjas* assaulted,
Chased them back across the meadow.
Hard as stone, the Slavic heroes
Gathered back in Komarusha,
Albanians waited in the gravel,
Like a she-bear them pursuing.
Here and there they lunged, but neither
Side would dare defeat the other,

So entangled were the fighters,
None would cede the way, retreating,
Thus they strutted, vaunting, bragging,
As they circled one another,
Each band staring at the other,
Curled up ready like a serpent,
Or like eddies in the river
Drin when ice and snow are melting,
Foaming white and downstream loudly
Crashing crosswise 'gainst a bridgehead,
Rising upwards, curling, swirling,
'round in circles like a maelstrom,
Up to Rozafat resounding,
Petrifying all observers.
Thus they rushed at one another,
Grappled, struggled in hand combat,
Sabres slashing arms and heads off,
Wounding, killing with *shejshanas*.
There they held out 'til the sunlight
Ran its course and reached conclusion,
'til the twilight faded, left and
Cast a black veil o'er the planet.
Rifles, cannons on the passes
Now fell silent, voices vanished,
Left behind them all the wounded,
Sprawled in red pools on Çakorri,
Some of them were slowly crawling,
Like the vermin on a dungheap.
Sad, they moaned and groaned, some dying,
Others pleaded for assistance.
Meanwhile did the wind cease blowing
Which had raged throughout the day there,
Clouds did cover o'er the heavens,
And it started pouring, drenching.
In the rain and early twilight
To our forces came assistance,
Band on band and row on row like
She-wolves flanked from frost and hunger.
With his soldiers came Prêlë Tuli
From Sutjeska running swiftly,
On the ridge appeared the hero,
Under which that day had struggled

Hoti, Vasoviq, Gruda,
Hurling insults at each other.
Sabres brandished, looked like sword flags,
Bullets fired, you'd think them pebbles.
Fighters from Malcija e Madhe
Like *kulshedras* in Elbnishta
Massed, reached Reka and Kuqishta,
Some alone and some in units.
Dukagjini, there like lightning,
Turned up at Qafa e Diellit.
Has and Nikaj reached Meteja,
With Merturi right behind them,
Swirled like waves of pelting hailstones
Cooling off a sweating farmer.
Men of Strellc and of Rogova
Fell on Mokra e Shekullarit,
And Postriba seized Gradina,
Near the bridge they took position,
Shllaku dug in at Marina,
Gjani occupied Stork Mountain.
Yes, the Good One, the Great *Zana,*
Led the fighters through the darkness,
Brought them over narrow pathways,
Some down hillsides, some through meadows,
All around the *shkjas* they circled,
Snared them as if caught in pincers,
Waited for the sun to rise to
Close in with their rifles, sabres.
One by one turned up the heralds,
Swarmed, informing Mark Milani
How the Albanians had surrounded
All his army, seized the country.
Mark Milani twirled his whiskers,
Pensive was the mighty leader,
In his mind remained a vision
Of an old man dreamt that morning,
Paused there by himself and pondered,
How he bit his lips while thinking,
How he frowned, his forehead wrinkled!
To his feet then leapt the leader.
Like a shepherd in the mountains,
Who when sheep or goat or heifer

Leaves the herd and wanders grazing,
Not returning in the evening
To its stall or pen, does stride out
Through the brushwood, up the clearings,
Back and forth in glades and meadows,
Searching everywhere to find it,
Find and catch the beast that's vanished.
So it was with Mark alone there,
Grown to one his heavy eyebrows,
Swiftly did he climb the mountain
Through the driving rain and darkness,
E'er advanced with one objective,
To encounter Captain Mirko,
Mirko, he whose fame was known to
Austria's emperor and the sultan.
When the leader came upon him,
Did he greet him and address him:
"By the Lord, good Captain, never
Since my birth, since I've been living,
Have I been in such misfortune
As this night, for the Albanians
Have besieged us, I am fearful
They'll break up, destroy our army.
For this night is ill-impending.
Have you any good suggestion?"
"I do not know what to tell you,"
In a low voice murmured Mirko,
"I just know we took the army,
Came to make war on this country,
Did not set out on a Tuesday,
As is custom, but on Friday,
Evil has my heart portended.
No, by God, I cannot tell you,
I don't know how things will end up.
But it is a waste of time to
Sit around and weigh and ponder.
I would think now, good Commander,
This is truly my opinion,
It would be the best solution,
If we left through shrubs and bushes,
Braving rains and braving windstorms,
Took to River Lim the army,

In the darkness of the nighttime
Slipped away before the sunrise,
With or without rafts and bridges,
That Marina Pass we strive for,
And from there we further hasten
On the road up to Cetinje.
If we don't, by God, I fear that
We will lose the army with the
Albanians on our back and weather,
If we don't, my Lord, we'll perish.
Mark gave orders for the army
To evacuate the region,
Down the mountain each battalion
At the Lim to reassemble.
Meanwhile, half the night had vanished,
And the Pleiades went under,
Rain and windstorm had departed,
Right away had ceased the thunder.
Now though loomed a pitch-black cloud and
From Durmitor set off, flying,
Like a tempest crossed the sky and
Wrapped the ridge of Mount Çakorri.
When it on Çakorri settled,
God in heaven, show us mercy,
You alone are our creator!
How that cloud did burst, exploding,
Flashes, bolts of lightning crackled,
Claps of thunder echoed widely,
Roaring, groaning in the distance.
How the earth did rumble, quaking,
Lightning flashing, never stopping,
Fulminating through the heavens,
Splitting spruce trees, breaking beeches
In the highland pastures, roaring,
Cleaving cliffs and promontories.
Downwards, ridge to ridge, they tumbled,
Taking with them trunks of oak trees,
Hurling all into the canyons,
Splashing into foaming torrents.
Then a tempest started blowing,
Gusts and gales in all directions,
With full force and fury blasting,

O'er the Highlands and the lowlands,
Ripping up old sessile oak trees,
Like you'd pull a stock of leek out.
Like you'd cull and clip some cuttings,
Did the storm wind hurl them flying,
Gales a-blowing, terrifying,
Cast them over cliffs, as gusts of
Wind did flatten Highland pastures.
From the depths the earth did grumble,
Sending tremors, swaying, as the
Ridges flamed on Mount Çakorri,
Never-ending squalls and lightning
Scoured that cliff face, twenty paces,
Like a saucepan from Gojani,
Forests blazed on Koprivniku,
On the pastures of Trojani,
In the glades and groves and oak glens,
Shady places, woods and fences.
Smoke lay heavy o'er the region,
Smell of sulphur, of scorched ruins,
Broiling, baking, heat emitting
That the waters of Lake Plava
Started simmering and seething.
On the peaks of Zeletini
Bolts of lightning flashed and crackled,
Beech groves in the heat exploded,
Woodlands smouldered near Meteja.
In that storm and cataclysm
Soil and sky did mix together,
You'd have thought that Mother Earth would
Shatter into dust and fragments,
In this endless chaos that the
World would burn to bits and crumble.
When the day-star in the heavens
Peered out from behind the mountains,
Did the storm pass, soothed the weather,
Shone like dewdrops in the garden.
Still the Highland pastures trembled,
Mountain lakes and creeks and torrents
Overflowed their banks and, foaming,
Gushed all muddy to the valleys.
From its bed the Lim departed,

Nowhere leaving fords to cross it,
Wretched are the souls who must
Traverse the river now, a-wading.
Then it dawned, the light returning,
Mark Milani, valiant hero,
Called and gathered up his army,
Led it to the Lim bridge crossing,
Not a word said, no one hearing,
Pacing swiftly down the path to
Get them back to Montenegro,
Left behind provisions, cannons.
But the master who had built it,
Made it narrow, wood was lacking,
Thus I'm fearful of the flooring,
Mark is going to get a drenching...
Land of mishap is Albania,
Heads have no more worth than pitchers,
It's unlikely Mark will flee it
Without some thorn in his waistcoat.
What is more now, at the bridgehead,
Men have taken up position
From Rogova, pistols ready,
Birds could never fly across it.
When the army reached the river,
Mokra e Shekullarit echoed,
Distant Metohija thundered,
Fright seized the commander's courser
When the rifles' ricocheting,
When the bullets' whir and whizzing,
Pelted them as would a hailstorm.
Low laid all the Montenegrins,
Shooting, the Albanian army them
On three sides had surrounded,
Vaunting volleys with their rifles
'cross the hills and down the valley,
Trapped by land, the Lim behind them,
In a net they were entangled.
What would Mark do now, poor fellow,
What would he be thinking, scheming?
He'd fight back, as was his custom,
That was what poor Mark was pond'ring.
Women, too, in Montenegro

Fight for freedom, faith and country,
Would not Mark Milani hold out,
He of noble race whose name was
Known in Europe, causing panic
To the Seven Kings and sultan?
Mark Milani, when he saw that
He was wedged by hill and water,
Called out loudly to his soldiers,
Shouting from atop his courser:
"Rise now, Montenegrin falcons,
Pave the way back to your homeland,
Beat your foe, lads, back with fury,
Let the Lim flow blood-red, foaming."
All the region turned to fire,
Braising like a quicklime oven,
Shots rang out from pole to pole as
Shkjas fought and Albanians battled.
Never-ending was the clamour
At that mountain when the rifles
Clashed and fired, there resounding
To the groaning of the injured.
And the *shkjas* were now attacking,
Notwithstanding paths and trenches,
Got the upper hand, advancing,
Many times it almost seemed they'd
Force their way right through our army,
Setting out to reach Cetinje.
Montenegro's savage *ora*
On the *shkjas* bestowed much courage,
Showed the fighters how to battle,
Guiding young ones, guiding old ones,
Led the forces there resisting
Everywhere our men had snared them.
But the Great *Zana* espied her,
Saw the *ora*, recognized her,
Kept her eyes fixed right upon her.
Then the Good One changed her shape and
Turned into a cloud well-hidden,
Waiting 'til the *ora* neared her,
Waiting 'til she could attack her,
Grapple with her and do battle,
And ne'er free that Slavic *ora*,

Keep her in her clutches that she
Not assist the Montenegrins
On their march and fateful venture.
When the sun rose, did the Slavic
Ora through the skies come coursing,
Swiftly shooting like an arrow.
How the *zana* lunged and snared her,
As a goshawk, mountain eagle,
Snares a serpent when it spies one,
Takes it back to feed its youngsters.
When the *ora*, eyes a-goggle,
Mountain *ora* from Durmitor,
Noticed Vizitor's Great *Zana*
Winging swiftly right behind her,
How she banked and deftly darted
Upwards, downwards to elude her,
Into one cloud, then another,
Hiding behind hills and mountains,
Hov'ring just above the surface,
Shooting upwards to the heavens,
Doing what she could to flee her.
When she finally saw she couldn't
Get away from the Great *Zana*,
Did the witch turn 'round, attacking,
To do battle with the *zana*,
For the *ora* was courageous,
Was indeed a dauntless fighter,
Ne'er gave up without resistance,
Thus her custom and her habit
Since she'd been in Montenegro.
Throat to throat and hair a-ripping,
Did the *ora, zana* grapple,
How they tore at one another,
With their teeth and nails a-clawing.
Blood in streams coursed down their faces,
Wild and savage did they fight on
As they winged across the heavens,
Biting, cursing one another,
Wrathful, shrieking at their loudest.
How they tackled one another,
Lacerating, mutilating,
Stretched their bodies to the heavens,

Shrunk themselves to tiny glow worms,
Now two earthly vipers brawling,
Swinging fiercely in the heavens,
Fighting, punching at each other,
Like two dragonflies in summer,
Nipping, chewing one another,
Pushing, pulling one another
Full of outrage and of anger,
That their struggle'd make you dizzy.
Neither one emerged the victor,
Got the better of her rival.
Look now, in the air approaching
Are two witches riding turtles,
Somewhere from Iballja's meadows,
One called Suta, one Pasuta,
Yes, on turtles, huge sea turtles,
Just as big each as a saddle,
Yes, two witches like gourd bottles
Filled with milk put in the pantry,
Skin and bones, they both were hunchbacks,
Like two sickles in the attic,
Savage beings, troublemakers,
From whom there was no escaping.
'mongst the seven tribes of Puka,
They let heal no gun infections,
Despite garlic, sutures, scissors
Hanging right above the wounded,
Let not grow and thrive the children,
Made all young lads lame and ailing,
Gave the girls and women jaundice,
Turned those poor folk into lizards,
Seven feet of work accomplished,
Seven feet in vain they laboured,
God protect them and their toiling!
Travelling to a witch convention,
They were headed for New Kotor,
When the sunlight overtook them
For at home they long had dawdled,
Brewing up some new concoction,
For themselves and for the turtles,
Whom they'd ride across the heavens.
While the witches thus were flying

On the backs of both their turtles,
Passing over Metohija,
In the rosy-fingered sunlight,
Did they see the Slavic *ora*,
Saw the *zana* of Albania,
One another's throats a-throttling,
Faces, breasts in blood a-mottling,
Teeth a-biting, claws a-scratching.
So the ancient witches turned the
Turtles' heads in that direction,
Trounced the hapless Slavic *ora*,
As if they were two *kulshedras*,
One more savage than the other.
Suta, on her back a-pouncing,
Seized her hair and yanked it stiffly,
Almost tore the *ora*'s head off,
Shook her roughly without mercy,
Like you'd reap flax in Zadrima,
Ketled-faced was now Pasuta,
In her mouth was but one hook tooth,
In the air her hair was flutt'ring,
Body pricked up like a trigger,
Pasuta's clawed hand seized the *ora*
In the craw and overcame her,
Throttled all the breath out of her,
With the other like a hackle
Scratched and tore at all her body,
Up and down, across and sideways,
With those talons, sharp as jackdaws,
All the greater to torment her.
How she fought, the Slavic *ora*,
Scrapped and struggled, shrieking, shouting,
Kicking out in all directions,
But in vain, for the Great *Zana*,
Helped by Suta and Pasuta,
Held her in the air so tightly.
Off to Vizitor they took her,
To the tomb of wretched Tringa,
Tied and lashed her to the linden,
Which the *oras* of Trojani'd
Dug out from Muç Hasi's glade and
Carried back to Mount Vizitor.

There the Blessed Ones did plant it
Three feet deep at Tringa's graveside.
Once they'd lashed her to the linden,
Back to Nokshiq flew the *zana*,
Where the Albanians, Montenegrins,
Still were battling one another.
Then did Suta and Pasuta
Catch and seize a living serpent,
Viper full of gall and poison.
With it did they start to wallop
Montenegro's wretched *ora*,
Without any care, I tell you,
For the *ora*'s pains and anguish.
Now the turtles, wild, tore at her,
Biting flesh out of her body.
Savage scene, the *ora* bellowed,
Hollered to the vaults of heaven,
Writhing, trying to escape them.
"Stop your noise, you silly maiden,"
Bade Pasuta, jeering, scoffing,
"Think I'm going to liberate you?
Not before I've bathed your body
All in blood, you horrid Hydra!
You supported and assisted
Mark Milani, Slavic scion,
As he strove to crush Albania,
To Cetinje's prince submit it.
Did you think the foes would vanish,
That the prince could come a-riding,
Snatch Albanian land and rule it?"
Once again she seized the serpent
Started thrashing, full of anger.
How the *ora* whined and whimpered,
Like a roof cat in the winter.
When Durmitor's Slavic *ora*
Tied and lashed was to the linden,
Trussed up by Vizitor's *zana*,
Did the Montenegrin army
To a man lose pluck and courage,
And departed. Right behind them
Followed the Albanian army,
You'd go deaf with all the clamour.

Some they killed and some they wounded,
Others had their heads subtracted,
Some yet in the Lim did perish.
Mark Milani's three battalions
Were defeated on the war grounds,
Heads three hundred there were hacked off,
Shkjas three hundred taken prisoner.
How the Great *Zana* rejoiced now,
As from cliff to cliff she fluttered,
Struck up carols, started singing
From a cliff on Mount Vizitor,
Down to New Kotorr it echoed:
"Well, I warned you, Prince Nikolla,
Vowed I would avenge our Tringa
By the light of dusk tomorrow!
Heads three hundred that I'd cut off,
Shkjas three hundred I'd take prisoner,
Snare three thousand brides and maidens,
Make before their time them widows,
Let them mourn like all the others
In the huts of Montenegro,
Like those black-enshrouded bugbears?
Just inquire of Mark Milani,
He will surely spread the story,
He will bear the woeful tidings,
Tell how many died at Nokshiq.
Albania has a watchful *ora*,
For she calls herself Albanian.
War will always be requited,
Heads like hail to earth will tumble,
If the people are convinced to
Fight for fatherland and sultan.

Canto 26

THE NEW AGE

After long portrayals of battle, Canto 26 makes a pleasant contrast with its idyllic scenes. Here the poet enters the work himself. He is spending the spring in Lezha to finish The Highland Lute and invites the *zana*, his muse, to visit. The springtime beauties of ancient Lissus inspire the poet to revive the history of the region: the construction of the castle of Lezha with its Cyclopean walls, the lives of the fabled kings of Illyria, the grave of Scanderbeg, as well as legends and mythology. Now after five hundred years of Turkish rule, a new age is dawning, that of freedom and independence for Albania.

Oh, good *zana*, I implore you,
How is it that you've forgotten
Me when ancient feats evoking,
When you take to songs and frolic?
Rather do you flutter from one
Apple tree unto another,
Flit from quince to quince while singing,
With your fair cohorts cavorting,
Chanting, prancing, making merry
In the glades and in the meadows,
Midst the beeches, firs and pine trees,
Where the goshawks do their nesting,
Apples and cornelian cherries
Blossom while the *oras, zanas*
Lead the movements in the moonlight.
Slim your figure, a *breshana*,
Arms and hands are like the sunbeams,
Both your cheeks are rose-pink petals,
Lily leaves your legs resemble,
Like the nightingale your voice, with
But a fleck of frost and snowflakes,
Like a star which shines and shimmers,
Oh, my swelling leaf in springtime,
Oh, my wintry pear so precious,
All your life you've spent in singing,
Spent in play with shepherds piping,
Chasing butterflies in canyons,

Plucking flowers in the meadows,
Hunting deer up on the cliff sides,
Splashing in the springs and leading,
Playful, all astray your sisters.
Oh Lord, may but goodness find you,
May but kindness you encounter
In the Highlands and the lowlands.
Do you know, my carefree creature,
Sunray slipping through the casement,
Snowflakes on my hair have fallen,
Strength of hands and feet is leaving,
I'll be writing not much longer,
To the life beyond I'll venture,
Whence no soul has ever come back.
Hear me out now, this I beg you.
Let them flutter, *shtozovalles*,
Butterflies up in the canyons,
Let the deer take to the mountains,
Leave the violets and the lilies,
Leave the mountain springs and torrents,
For I fear, my peregrine falcon,
Resting, soaking in those waters,
In the sunlight and the moonlight,
That you'll freeze to ice, good maiden,
You will perish, be my death, too.
Leave, abandon Dukagjini,
Wrapped there in the cold of winter
In the linden's hollow branches.
Fly up to the heavens, soaring,
Like a comet in the nighttime,
Flashing, glowing through the aether,
Come and visit ancient Lissus,
Here, where far from din and clamour,
I have reached this vernal bower,
With the Highland Lute to sing of
How the strings of fate were woven
For my homeland, how it fled the
Turkish yoke and Slavic clutches,
How the Lord Almighty deemed that
It be sov'reign, independent,
After all the blood and carnage.
Many folk are evil, cruel

In this backward age we live in,
No one can enjoy his freedom
Without fighting, without bloodshed.
Thus today I send my greetings
To you, Good One, raised in pine trees,
Come to see me here in Lissus,
Help me to complete this song and
Give me counsel and direction,
Keep me in the bounds of wisdom,
Keep my thinking noble-minded,
That my sounds be sometimes gentle
Like the breezes in the springtime,
Sometimes mighty and assertive
Like the gale force of a windstorm.
That my words and speech flow smoothly,
Teaching minds and touching hearts that
Folk be led and drawn to goodness,
Thus advancing faith and homeland.
If my song is rightly fashioned,
Will the people of Albania
One day mass to celebrate you,
Make the Alps and pastures flourish,
Just as you would like to have them,
Singing in the sunshine, moonshine.
Here you'll have no grounds for boredom,
Here you'll suffer no displeasure
In the zephyrs of this season,
Time when nature is reviving.
You'll find everything you long for,
Glow worms gleaming in the nighttime,
Gushing waters, lavish green'ry,
In the valleys, on the hill sides,
In the leas and grassy meadows,
In the shade and streams and fountains,
Swallows, swans and cranes migrating,
Violets, lilies and carnations,
Budding roses, many-coloured
Butterflies and ladybirds with
Nightingales in branches trilling,
Kid-goats bleating in the brambles,
Lambs in shady pastures whining,
Grapevines fondling cypress trees and

Peaches, apricots in blossom,
Cherries ripening on the branches,
Budding leaves on oaks and elm trees,
Figs on tent-like trees a-sweetening,
On the Drin the poplars rising,
Fragrant blossoms of the linden.
In the shade will flutes and twin pipes
Echo old Albanian folk songs,
Blue the sky and nature verdant.
Up there winter, here is springtime,
Season loved by *oras*, *zanas*
In the moonlight all cavorting,
Up the hills and o'er the meadows,
Here especially, in this region,
Where grows fruit on slender branches,
In the mountains, shady pastures,
In the forests and the canyons,
There are many *shtozovalles*,
Your companions, chanting, singing,
Playing games and making merry,
Far and wide their mirth resounding,
All would swear, right to Valbona,
That this land has been forever
Known as meeting place, a passage,
And a venue for the *zanas*,
Place where giants met Cyclopes,
Long before the soil was settled
By Illyrians and Albanians,
Who did battle, lacerating
One another, teeth a-tearing,
Only later did they combat
Aiming arrows, seizing slingshots,
Some with clubs and some with cudgels,
Others using hatchets, axes,
Sabres and long-barrelled rifles.
To the earth they fell and perished,
Some for faith and some for country.
Some were brigands, others martyrs,
Some accomplices, assassins.
Yet, there's much more if you visit.
You will also view the castle,
Built upon that hill titanic,

On Cyclopean foundations,
Old at least three thousand years they
Rise there, menacing, like phantoms,
Over opposition forces
Who with predatory instinct
Might decide to cross the river.
And you'll hear that water weeping,
Even now the Drin's lamenting
At George Castriota's grave side,
He who brandished once his sabre,
Flashed it at Albania's foemen,
Like a bolt from the Almighty.
Here, too, dwelled once King Bardylis
Who the landscape drenched with foe blood,
Here, too, reigned once Queen Teuta,
Falcon-heart, Illyrian maiden
Who knew not of fear the meaning.
Like a horn-beaked mountain eagle,
Did she rush upon the Romans,
Turned blood-red the Adriatic.
Here lived Clinic and Pleuratus,
Hila, Agron and poor Genthius,
Who were raised here and did flourish.
In good luck and in misfortune,
Some were victors, some were victims.
Gaulish tribes, indeed, here wandered.
Through this country passed the Romans.
Slavs and Turks the land did honour,
Or did shame it with their presence.
When the moon appears at nighttime,
Do the *oras, zanas* gather,
Holding hands they stand assembled,
Holding hands as white as snowflakes,
Let their gentle voices sing out,
See them swaying and intoning
Battles fought by our forefathers,
By those old Illyrian heroes,
As they mourn the bitter fate of
This, our wretched land, Albania,
Which was wrapped in robes of mourning
When the Turks invaded, seized it,
On the death of Castriota,

Scourge of God, those Turkish fighters,
And the mountains, canyons echo
To the droning and the dancing.
If you, nonetheless, are weary,
Bored of listening to my singing,
(though without you, oh, my *zana*,
I would hardly get a word out,
Not a word that's worth remembering)
Go forth in the nightly moonlight,
Or should summer heat oppress you,
Seek the mountains or cool valleys,
Summoning your spritely sisters.
There, devote yourself to pleasure
And enjoyment, my good *zana*,
Forming hand in hand a ring dance,
Sing as long as you should wish to.
Or, if you prefer, would rather,
Chase the deer and go a-hunting,
Taking your companions with you,
Up to Molung or Mount Vela.
There you'll does and boars encounter,
Apples, blackberries, strawberries,
Honey hollows, cold spring water,
Shady spots, refreshing breezes,
Hear the bleating, sheep bells ringing,
Which I know you've always longed for.
There's one thing, my *çifelia*,
Word of warning I must offer.
When you venture to Mount Vela,
When you fly up to that mountain,
You will come across a cavern,
Deep and dark, not far from Rreja,
With mouth sculpted like an oven,
Out of which a spring emerges,
Strong enough to turn a millstone.
Take care that you do not enter,
Take care not to quaff the water.
In that cavern was Black Lleshi,
Man of Gjonmarkaj, a captain,
Ear to ear did stretch his moustache.
On a stormy night with lightning,
All the world shook from the thunder,

He attacked a wild *kulshedra*.
With a pair of heavy pincers
Did he clutch it by the throat and
With a ring of iron tied it
So that it could not escape him,
Dragged it to the cavern's bottom,
Plunged it deep into the water.
Even now one hears the clanking
Of the pincers in the water
Every time the dragon struggles,
For the pincers have remained there
Wrapped around the wild *kulshedra*,
Like a bell around a he-goat.
Blood thus often floods the water,
Many people there have seen it,
For the pincers chafe the dragon,
Will not let the wound recover
Which was opened by Black Lleshi,
When he in that storm attacked it.
Watch that you don't quaff the water,
Dare not go into that cavern,
For today within the cavern
Are convening Kthella's witches
With the hexes of Mirdita,
And of Zhuba and Selita.
They all love to get together,
Roast a wolf and braise its sinew,
With it paralyse some person,
Or in smoke brew some concoction,
Smear upon some house the potion,
To bring damage and destruction
To the animals and people.
They will halt the children's growing,
Gorge on hearts and lungs for dinner.
Take good care you do not enter,
For they'll gobble you while living.
Would you rather spend your leisure
Time a-wand'ring at the seaside,
There to swim and find refreshment?
Or perchance to go horse riding
On the stallion in our stables,
With its mane decked out and plaited?

On the Drin you'll spy the seagulls
White as snow on Haramia.
You can ride one, if you want to.
But there's one thing I beg of you,
'round its neck do hold it tightly,
You are but a ray of sunshine,
Not too heavy for a seagull,
You can ride it down the river,
Down the Drin right to the ocean.
When arriving at the seaside,
On the beach you'll see before you,
Floçka, Kshetza, both sunbathing,
Combing hair and picking nits out,
Playing, teasing one another,
Making merry in the sand dunes,
Hair a-flowing, scarves a-flapping,
Blouses stitched with braided ribbons,
For they truly are like mermaids.
Like the leeches and sea turtles
They lived both on land and water,
When they talk it is like cawing,
They can only squawk and screech but
If a person caught them living,
Took them to his home and raised them,
They would speak in good Albanian.
Once a nice lad from Kelmendi
Expert marksman and fine speaker,
As say all the country people,
Captured, caught one of the Floçkas,
Took her home with him and kept her,
Taught her how to speak Albanian,
Then he held with her a wedding,
Turned the maid into a housewife.
As his spouse she ran his household,
Raised the children, well behaving,
With her mountain robes and knitting,
Like the other tribal women.
Yet could anyone who saw her,
Know straight off that she was different,
For her eyes were slanted, narrow,
And she never ceased to gossip,
Like the stones forever sliding

Down the mountains o'er the caverns.
Now, good *zana*, slender figure,
Slight of form and raised in orchards,
I've another tale to tell you,
It will touch you. Now for ages
The white *zanas, shtozovalles,*
Had been leading dancing, singing,
In Helicon's cornel copses,
Drinking from the Fons Castilius
Then, the Hills of Hellas leaving,
They migrated to Albania,
Where they speak and where they sing now
In Albanian, what a pleasure!
Raised the folk to be enlightened,
For the Albanians are not nomads,
Are not beasts born in the forests,
Are not folk devoid of homeland
Whom the Turks and *shkjas* can trample.
From Albania must be chased the
Turkish Empire so the country
Can attain its independence,
That it ne'er be ruled by Stamboul's
Sultan, that the strangers always
Grind their teeth and stay out of our
Matters, ever keeping silent.
Now at last have the Albanians
Started to reflect, consider
Their affairs, to write their language,
Write Albanian and to teach it
In the schools, since they are clever
People who have heads, not pitchers,
Found with time the path of knowledge,
Found with time the way to culture.
Now, indeed, do they from Turkey
Seek autonomy, demanding,
If not granted, then, their freedom,
And with weapons will they win it,
Foreign yoke they will not suffer.
I know now, my cherry-eyed one,
Realize that you'd prefer to
Seek out pastures, shade in mountains,
Relish in the springs and fountains,

There encounter your companions,
Lounge around with them conversing,
Take to dancing and to singing,
Take to chanting and to playing,
Never more be in bad weather,
Ever springtime, all the year round.
Be off with you, slender grapevine,
Sunray winging through the window,
If desire should overtake you
For companions, entertainment.
Woe, what shall I do without you?
For I know it is your custom
Ne'er to settle in one region,
Here today and gone tomorrow,
You will wander o'er the country,
Vela, Kodhel, Kryebushati,
Worth its weight in gold, that region,
Set off for Rozafat Castle,
To that site in daunting Shkodra,
Pride and glory of our nation,
There, you'll come across the *zanas*
Who from Helicon migrated.
When the moon appears at nighttime,
You will strike up songs and dancing
There with your Albanian sisters,
To the sound of flutes and twin pipes,
Join the chorus, take to prancing,
Without care and without worry,
Dance and frolic, do make merry,
Sing as much as you are able.
Yet, I beg you to return here,
For this song, if sung without you,
Will be naught but bitter mourning.
Please yourself in sun and moonlight,
You'll thus have no grounds for boredom.
Days will pass as you prefer them,
Without care and without worry.
Take the lute down from the rafters,
Come and play it, cherry-eyed one,
Slender figure, raised in orchards,
Strum for me a tune, intoning,

I will sing and you will sing as
Trill the gentle birds of summer.

Canto 27

THE COMMITTEE

The twentieth century has arrived. On the banks of the Bosphorus, a committee of Turkish pashas meets during the uprising of the Young Turks in 1908 to decide the fate of Albania. The liberality of Sinan Pasha is countered by Xhavid and Turgut Pasha who recognize but one Turkish nationality in the Ottoman Empire and who demand the use of force to put down the Albanian rebels.

Erven Pasha, of the Committee,
Held at Babi-Ali assembly.
"Gentlemen," he said, addressing,
"Since the decree of the Committee
Stating all the sultan's subjects,
All the people, men and women,
Must be known as Ottomans and
Must deny their ethnic backgrounds,
Sacrifice what they have stood for,
Must renounce their race and kinship,
All the countries of the sultan
Have now bowed their heads in meekness,
Swearing they are Ottomans, have
Race and language now forgotten.
Thus (may God extend their lives) have
Merged the Turks, the Lac and Zeybeks,
Greeks, Armenians and Arabs,
Both the Bedouin tribes and Jews, yes
All of Turkey's many peoples,
None protesting, none lamenting.
You'd have thought one mother'd birthed them.
But the Albanians unconvinced were
To be brothers with the rest, and
Ottomans declare themselves, though
Recognizing Turkey's sultan,
Also somewhat the Committee,
But they'll not renounce their ethos,
Not forsake their ways and customs,

Both the Christians and the Muslims,
Ghegs and Tosks throughout Albania,
Call themselves Albanians only.
And, indeed, my good companions,
Recently they've started writing
Books and journals in their language,
Opened schools up in Albanian.
What is more, they won't be willing
To provide recruits and soldiers.
They're autonomy demanding,
Want Albania's independence,
From this day they will refuse to
Pay the Turks their tithes and taxes,
Long to set up and create some
Land beyond the sultan's shadow,
Want to rule it by themselves, and
Not submit to beys and pashas.
What to do I cannot tell you."
Then the Young Turk, Xhavid Pasha,
Turned and spoke to the assembly:
"Each and every one I'd slaughter,
For they've always been a nuisance,
Never give us peace and quiet,
Only trouble. Did you know that
From the time the Turks invaded,
Took Albania, to the present,
I with tearful eyes must tell you,
Have the Albanians on no less than
Fifty-four occasions fought us?
Weapons seizing, they attacked us,
Face to face in open combat,
As the Turks and *shkjas* do battle,
Yes, they've brought us tribulation,
For they're not unskilled as marksmen.
That is why you have to punch them
In the nose, these foul Albanians,
That they never more should venture
To cause woe to the Committee."
Sinan Pasha, bearded elder,
Whirled and cried out: "Slow down! Careful!
For they are an ancient people,
Can't be slapped like Moorish soldiers.

Years four hundred since we entered,
Snatched Albania, have no others
Done more to defend this country.
Who's done more than the Albanians?
With us did they go to Yemen,
Spilt their blood in Sevastopol,
Throat to throat the *shkjas* they grappled,
Severed heads in Montenegro,
Always foremost on the war grounds,
Last retreating, first to perish,
Scorched in desert heat, or freezing,
Spared their lives not for the Empire.
What've we done for the Albanians,
What advantage have we offered?
What good work have we accomplished
Since we occupied Albania?
All we've done is burn and rampage,
Wrest from them their land and houses,
String them up and let them perish,
Trample on their ways and customs,
Let our functionaries trounce them,
Let our agas rape and ravage,
Let tax farmers cause their downfall,
Off their backs the shirts we've stolen.
Have we ever built a bridge or
For them raised a road or highway,
Was a school there ever opened,
Did we patch a single pothole?
Should Albania ever manage
To escape its Turkish master,
What will Turkey have bequeathed it,
But a mass of mosques for praying?
Why should always the Albanians
Be beneath our sway in serfdom?
Why deny their native country
And the tongue of their forefathers?
Let me state in perfect candour,
It's not their fault, the Albanians,
If they'll not put up with Turkey,
If they've now become impatient.
With a cudgel, do believe me,
You can't conquer the Albanians.

Rather treat them gently, and they'll
Wade for you through fire and water.
Therefore, it is my suggestion
Not to goad them, the Albanians,
Let us rather drop the matter,
Not in vain provoke misfortune."
To his feet rose Turgut Pasha,
Frowning with his bushy eyebrows,
Bowed and spoke out to the meeting,
Prudent and with circumspection:
"Gentlemen, long life I wish you,
Let's not splash about in water,
Proffer unto Turkey danger,
That she be chopped up, divided.
Gentlemen, it is my view that
We should subjugate Albania,
For those people need a thrashing
'round the ears to make them humble,
Make them humble and submissive.
Pluck that boil of freedom off them
And that independence nonsense,
Which has recently possessed them.
Since the sultan some years back now
Gave them leave to be a nation,
When the Congress of Berlin did
Force us to revise our borders,
Stamboul was surrounded, and when
Europe vaunted like a vampire,
Made us cede to Montenegro
Hoti, Gruda, Plava, Gucia,
Yes, believe me, since the time
Albania did become a nation,
Since the Turks did grant them leave to
Undertake some minor action,
Bear their arms and storm the hillsides
Of the Cem and there do battle,
Face to face with Slavic forces,
Like a country 'mongst its equals,
Have these fellows, these Albanians,
Started thinking, on this planet
They could live, survive without us,
If not now, then surely later,

By their friends, our foes, assisted,
They could flee, desert the sultan,
Like some other Balkan countries,
Make their laws themselves and govern,
Not obeying beys and pashas.
It is hard to tame a bear whose
Head is in a pot of honey,
You can shake it, pull its ears, but
Not remove it from its target.
I would venture to advise you
Not to let this matter slumber.
'If a mouse gets in your whiskers,'
As an ancient saying has it,
'It will make a trail for others.'
And to add to the Albanians,
We have Yemen and Armenia,
Have the Greeks and have the Zeybeks,
All the Moors and the Circassians,
All Bulgaria, full of fighters.
If we yield to the Albanians
On their language and their status,
This would have no other outcome
Than the rupture of poor Turkey.
All the other nations would be
Claiming thrones, would seek assemblies,
Village mayors would play the sultan.
This, good sirs, we cannot suffer.
There is no solution other
Than to send to that wild country,
Send a hundred armed battalions,
Which must, from the first day onwards,
If the venture is to prosper,
Seize their rifle belts, disarm them,
Bring a wooden cane and beat them,
Give them all a thorough thrashing,
'til they are convinced, submissive.
How can bandits from the forest
Dare to contradict the sultan,
And oppose, too, the Committee?
Power is the sultan's realm, and
Without power there's no Empire,
With our power Turkey rose up,

Powerless, we lose Albania,
Lose Albania and Arabia,
Like we lost, alas, the Balkans,
Foes would mount and master Turkey."
Thus addressed them Turgut Pasha,
"Bravo!" did applaud the members,
Nominating him commander,
Of one hundred armed battalions
To bring order to the country,
Force the people to submit and
Say that they are Ottomans all,
As the Young Turks had requested.
On this earth, in sun and moonlight,
There's no country like Albania
For its mountains and its hillsides,
For its plains and verdant valleys,
Alpine pastures, lowland meadows,
Fields for grazing, fertile farmland,
With its lakes and brooks and rivers,
Fountains, springs of mountain water,
Kissed on one side by the ocean,
Fish of all kinds in great numbers,
Herds abounding with their offspring.
Grapevines twine, silkworms meander,
Joy to see the country people,
Nature here does thrive and flourish,
Mirror-like the clear-blue heavens,
Highland winters, lowland summers,
No place like it on the planet,
Land which everyone would envy.
Yet, to what avail, oh brother?
Should you get it as a present,
You would certainly disdain it,
So deceptively assaulted
By that Turkish Turgut Pasha
With his hundred armed battalions,
Who with Moorish troops, Circassians,
Turkoshaks and Anatolians,
Asians, Roma, Lac and Zeybeks,
Kurds and Arabs, desert farmers,
Bearing rifles, gun belts ready,
With their fezzes, dervish turbans,

Barren soil is what they lived on,
Launched his troops against Albania,
As if he were fighting Moscow.
Like a plague of locusts swarming
When it gobbles up the grainfields,
Did his soldiers seize the country
Both the south and northern Highlands,
And the pasha, Turgut Pasha,
Frowning with his bushy eyebrows,
Set up cannons, set up mortars,
Issued then an ultimatum,
Giving no solution other
Than, once and for all, submission,
That the Albanians strip their gun belts,
That they give up all their weapons,
That they nevermore should venture,
Dare to call themselves Albanians,
That they renounce customs, *Kanun,*
That their schools not teach Albanian,
That they even cease to write it,
That they write in Turkish only,
And he ordered that the Highlands
And the lowlands muster soldiers
For the sultan, pay him taxes,
As the Young Turks had insisted,
Otherwise the land he'd ravage.
When the edict reached the Highlands
And the mountain elders read it,
Did they gather for a meeting:
"If your life you cherish, sultan,
Do not punish and torment us,
Let us keep our gun belts with us
For we're living near the border.
Often do we have to battle
With our Greek and Slavic neighbours.
In addition, you commanded
We not call ourselves Albanians,
That we call ourselves Ottomans,
And forget our native language.
Long life to you, pasha, but this
Contradicts and stains our honour.
If the sultan's laws we follow,

Though adapted to our country,
If we pay him tithes and taxes,
At the rates that we've been used to,
If the Empire deems to treat us
Kindly, keeping peace and order,
And not turn this land to desert,
We Albanians will then show you
With our deeds that we're Ottomans.
This I think is quite sufficient,
There's no need to start debating
On such terms and designations.
Turk or Ottoman, what matter?
Some are Jews and some Circassians.
We ourselves, sir, are Albanians,
Are Albanians and remain so.
That's the way we started, pasha,
That is, too, the way we'll finish.
As to sending you our soldiers,
We've no men to send to Yemen,
Or to any other country.
With the *shkjas* we're busy fighting,
Have no lads for Turkish warfare.
No, my Lord, my worthy pasha,
We reject your stipulation,
You've deployed your cannons, mortars.
Take, remove them, I beg of you,
'Live and let live,' that's the saying."
Thus the elders gave him answer.
Turgut Pasha was in anger
And in fury, loudly shouting:
"Throw those wretches into prison,
Let them know that within Turkey
There's no nation called Albania,
Just the sultan and Committee!"
Thus he jailed the Highland elders,
Who in battle for the sultan
With the *shkjas* up on the borders,
Had e'er bathed in blood the country.
Then the pasha gave an order
Not to open in Albania
An Albanian school, and raze the
Only one which had existed,

That of Elbasan, destroy it.
And should any of the people
Dare to function as reporters,
Or to publish, print a journal,
They should not be sent to justice,
But be laid out in the alley,
With a heavy cane be beaten,
'til their skin be torn to pieces,
'til they'd hear the angels singing.
But since he had now to hasten
Back to Stamboul, get there quickly,
He again thought through the matter,
Issued edicts, dispatched orders,
Then appointed some lieutenants,
Some Albanians, filthy loafers,
Foes of progress and of culture,
Men who never wanted, cared to
Hear the word Albania spoken,
Trash they were, naught but straw ordure,
Like the men, for instance, who did
Spread out poor Hafiz Myslimi
With his face down 'gainst the pavement,
With their stocks they thrashed and trounced him
To the sound of drums and wind pipes,
Beat him 'til his leg was broken,
'til he was forever crippled
For no other sin than speaking.
When the government did ask him:
"Are you Albanian or Ottoman?"
Did he straight off counter, saying,
Though he was a Koran teacher:
"I'm Albanian, blood and language."
Even while they had him stretched out
Face-down in the alley, battered,
Every time the *kajmekam* asked:
"What are you?" Hafiz responded:
"I'm Albanian, blood and language,"
'til his leg was broken, shattered.
Then they let him go, released him,
Shame upon themselves amassing.
After having denigrated,
Wrapped in mourning poor Albania,

Turgut Pasha, tall and thin he,
Wore his beret, twirled his whiskers,
Setting off for Stamboul, thinking
He the Seven Kings had vanquished,
Not a handful of Albanians
Without kith and kin, abandoned,
That you'd swear the earth had spewed them.
I'd, however, like to send to
Turgut Pasha words of warning:
Our Albania's an enigma,
Pluck out one straw, six will follow.

Canto 28

DEDË GJO' LULI

The spirit of resistance carries on in twentieth-century Albania in the figure of Dedë Gjo' Luli, champion of the cause against the Turks. It is 1910-1911, just before the Balkan wars in which the Turks will begin their last attempt to subject the Albanian Highlanders to Ottoman rule. With Dedë Gjo' Luli and his band of twenty 'falcons' is the aging Marash Uci of Rapsha in Hoti land, who appeared in Canto XII. Turgut Pasha with his seventy battalions demands that the Highlanders surrender within five days. He then prepares for the attack, but Europe now takes note of Albania's plight.

To their feet the Seven Kings sprang,
"What is all the clamour in the
Highlands up in Rapsha e Hotit?"
Dedë Gjo' Luli, ancient fighter,
With his savage Leka band is
Firing at the sultan's soldiers.
Dedë Gjo' Luli, living sabre,
Cap o'er brow, upon the staircase
Sent a word to Bedri Pasha:
"Greetings to you, Bedri Pasha,
To you do I send this message,
Please convey it to the sultan.
From today, and God's my witness,
All George Castriota's children,
All who call themselves Albanian,
Will no more pray for the sultan,
Will no longer recognize him.
Full five hundred years have passed now
That we've served the Turkish sultan,
Served him, chopping heads off for him,
Heads like jugs at Vraka market,
Never from him an advantage.
Time went by in dire misfortune,
Sometimes hunger, sometimes peril,
Always trouble, always fighting,
For he knew no other pastime
Than to murder, slay and ravage,

Lay waste and our land dishonour
With his agas and officials,
Men who've done no other work than
Whipping, beating, hanging people,
Robbing serfs and stealing farmland,
Worse conditions could not be for
Those of us born in Albania.
By the Lord, by Him we worship,
We this can no longer suffer,
Thus today I've seized my rifle,
Let fate now decide our fortune!"
Thus spoke Dedë and donned his armour,
In his garb and boots stood ready,
Sheathed his pistol in his gun belt,
Mauser rifle o'er his shoulder,
With a band of lads behind him
Swiftly hurtled down the roadway
Like a snowstorm in a fury,
Off to Rapsha did he lead them.
Off to Rapsha, Rapsha e Hotit,
To that venue of gunpowder
Both in ancient times and present,
Place where fires raged eternal,
Heads like blades of grass were mowed down
Every time the Lekas struggled
With the Turks and *shkjas* in battle,
Causing grief to Slavic women,
Putting Turkish wives in mourning,
With Martini rifles firing.
When they reached Brigja e Hotit
As the Pleiades took refuge,
Dedë Gjo' Luli, flash of powder,
Went to visit Marash Uci,
Knocked upon his door and shouted:
"Wake up, Mashi! There's no time for
Sleeping or for doing nothing,
With those Turks we have a problem."
Mashi, on a cowhide resting,
Rose at once and o'er his shoulders
Threw his heavy sheepskin jacket,
To the door he strode and answered:
"What? You want to take on Stamboul

With those boys you've got behind you?
All they do is they cause a ruckus
Everywhere such lads are present."
"Do not trouble, vex me, Mashi,
I'm not in the mood for teasing,"
Dedë in slow response admonished,
Offering his hand to Mashi.
To one side withdrew the heroes,
Took their seats and sat together,
Rolled tobacco. In a whisper
Dedë began the conversation:
"Gathered at the Church Pass, have the
Elders taken counsel calling
From each Highland house a fighter
To assault the Turks in battle
In a week. In my opinion
Much too slow. I'd rather see that
We this very night attack them.
Do you think that we could do it?"
"Never is attack too early,"
Marash mused with words of wisdom.
"We must throw these Ottomans out
Through the door or through the window,
Cast them from us quick as can be.
Yes, indeed, for this our country
Suffers from them like a fishbone
Wedged within our throats and choked on.
They could use a beating! 'Twould be
Good if you tonight attacked them.
But what weapons have you with you?"
"Seven Mausers and this pistol
In my belt," said Dedë Gjo' Luli.
"With them I think you'll disarm those
Turkish soldiers up in Rapsha,"
Marash Uci said to Dedë, "so
I will tell Kastrati, Shkreli,
Send word also to Kelmendi
That they hide their herds and kinfolk,
That their men guard well the passes,
Let's be off, lads! God be willing,
We'll defeat the Turkish forces.
May all Hoti take pride in you!"

Mashi yelled, and vanished indoors.
Who's now firing in Rapsha e Hotit?
Dedë Gjo' Luli, after praying,
Set out just before the sunrise
With his lads, those twenty falcons,
Eyes a-glowing, hearts like windstorms,
Seven Mausers and a pistol,
Preyed upon the sultan's soldiers
Holed up in their Turkish barracks,
Sixty soldiers rightly counted.
How the Plain of Rapsha echoed!
Veleçik resounded loudly,
Seven Mausers in wild volleys
Ever firing, never ceasing,
You'd have thought a whole battalion.
Dedë Gjo' Luli, mountain kite he,
Brought such lads, such fighters with him
As has neither king nor sultan,
Nor have other lands or oceans.
Foremost were Kolë Marash Vata,
Like a snowstorm, and Prêlë Keri
Who attacked the Turkish barracks
With the sultan's soldiers in them,
You'd have thought a nest of jackdaws,
Fearless of their own extinction,
Such the shouting and the screaming,
Such the din and such the clamour,
When the Highland Lekas pounced on
Those poor servants of the sultan
Hiding deep within their tower,
Killing some and wounding others.
Soon despaired the Turkish soldiers,
To the Highlanders surrendered
With their arms and their munitions.
After they were taken prisoner,
Did two Highland fighters lead them
Path by path and hill by hill and
Bear them back with them to Shkodra.
When a foe has been disarmed, thus
Every man who strives for honour
Knows that he will bring discredit
On himself if he'd but touch him,

Thus the Code of Dukagjini.
Like Midsummer Night when bonfires
Burn and rage up in the mountains,
Not at once, but now and then, some
Flaming wildly, some in embers
Here and there upon the hillsides,
So the barracks seized in Rapsha
Burned and flamed and fell to ashes.
On the morrow without firing,
All the barracks in the Highlands,
Both the big ones and the small ones,
On the Montenegrin border,
One by one gave up, surrendered.
Then did God permit to Gruda
That they drive the Turks from Deçiq,
Hoti conquered Krevenica,
Tuz's government was taken.
Then the army they encircled
At Shipshanik where it held out,
With the soldiers who were guarding
Dushkakuq and digging trenches.
They let not a bird escape them,
Not to mention Turkish fighters.
Thus did Turkey swiftly vanish
Both from Tuz and from Gucia,
Turfed out by those Highland marksmen.
Bedri Pasha, when he found out
What the Highlands had accomplished
For Albania and its freedom,
Was incensed and filled with anger,
Beat his skull and raged a-cursing
For he had no men in Shkodra
To put down the Highland tumult.
Thus, he called a council meeting
To decide what course to follow,
How to treat the matter, for a
Spectre'd risen in the Highlands,
Which would soon engulf Rozafat,
Settle into Shkodra's fortress
To the tune of pipes and drumming,
And before mankind and Europe
Raise the banner of Albania,

Make Albania her own mistress,
Not submitting to the sultan,
Not to pashas or lieutenants,
Not to clerks and civil servants,
Who had hung her by a rope as
Sheep and goats by feet are strung up.
Long the gentlemen took counsel,
Long they talked, exchanged ideas
How to act and staunch the torrent.
In the end they all agreed to
Send a message out by herald:
"All ye Turks, come now to Koplik!
For the nation's in great danger,
Highlanders are ousting Turkey,
Want their country independent!"
After prayers that afternoon
With all his might the herald bellowed:
"All ye Turkish bashibazouks,
Seize your arms and rush to battle,
Halt the tumult in the Highlands,
Our religion is in peril,
Shkodra has no Turkish forces."
Thus the herald gave the order.
To their feet jumped men two thousand,
Before sunset, all were Muslims,
Headlong did they rush to battle,
You'd have thought their feet were feathered.
How the Turks did set out shrieking,
All the outcry and the clamour!
To the hill of Mokset pressing,
They took Drume and took Deçiq,
Set the cannons of the sultan
Up to fire upon Bukoviq,
Made their base camp in Dinosha,
Dredging ditches, digging trenches,
Standing at attention, singing,
Leading dances all that evening.
What did Dedë Gjo' Luli utter
From a facing promontory?
"Come, oh Shkodra, to your senses,
For a long time we have known you.
To the tune of pipes and drumming

You will ne'er defeat the Highlands.
Gunpowder has parched our bodies,
We've forever been in battle
With the Turks and with *shkja* neighbours.
Take care not to cross swords with us
For we're kind to no intruders,
Save our friends who come to visit."
Thus spoke Dedë upon that cliff side
And the rifles commenced shooting.
Lord Almighty, thee we worship.
Gruda, Hoti, when they struck the
Bashibazouks in Dinosha,
How the hills and mountains echoed,
How the earth did roar like thunder!
Terrifying was the fighting,
As when Turks and *shkjas* do battle,
Or, worse still, when the Albanians,
To a man and as one body,
Friends, companions and relations,
All those noble marksmen standing
Shoulders touching in the clamour,
As when spilling blood together
In their fight with Montenegro.
May our strength and power wither
If our people are called Muslims,
Are called Orthodox or Christians.
It has always been our wont to
Lose our heads for foreign powers,
And, what's worse, to no advantage,
Or at their dire instigation
One another slay and slaughter.
Nonetheless, the Turks of Shkodra
On that day fell in Dinosha,
Some were killed and others taken,
Some, though bathed in blood, did scramble.
On the lowland hills of Mokset
Was there even more dire slaughter
'gainst the Turks and sultan's soldiers
Who had struck out for the Highlands.
All around they were besieged by
Hoti, Shkreli and Kastrati,
And the fighting in that battle

Lasted six and thirty hours.
In the end the Turks were vanquished,
Fled to Rrasë-Fik with their forces,
Leaving many heads behind them,
Fifty and one hundred fighters.
Like a wolf pack, freezing, hungry,
Wearied by the cold of winter,
When it falls on sheep and kid-goats,
Gashing some and gutting others,
Thus it was when God allowed them
To invade the Turkish trenches.
Serpent Gruda, viper Hoti,
Headed by Nikë Gjelosh Luli,
Ear to ear did stretch his whiskers,
Sprang on Turkish troops in Deçiq,
Had you seen him right before you,
You'd be seized with fright and terror,
Second to him was Mark Gjeka,
Pjeter Nikë Daku, famous hero,
Maça Grizhi, Lulash Zeka,
Blood flowed everywhere they turned up.
Soldiers discharged their machine guns,
Bashibazouks fired their rifles,
When assaulted by Zef Peri,
Prelë Kolë Shyti, Mirot Çuku,
Pjeter Gjokë Toshi, mighty fighter,
Lucë Prêlë Nishku, Gjelosh Gjoka,
Prelot Keqi, Ujkë Gjeloshi,
Dedë Gjon Ujka, Marash Doka,
Offspring of Martini rifles,
Fast as steel their word of honour,
E'er attacking, ne'er receding,
Wont to charge their foe in battle.
Nikë Gjeloshi both attacked and
Sprinted up the hillside thus to
Penetrate the Turkish trenches,
Like a *kulshedra* in the marshes.
Praise be to you, God Almighty,
So much gunfire, din in Deçiq,
Gruda, Hoti, Turks in conflict,
Rifles, bayonets and sabres,
With the other Highland fighters

Did one young lad take on Deçiq,
Named Hilë Mosi, hand on rifle,
In his breast the red-black banner.
Hilë, that young lad come from Shkodra,
Sacrificed his youthful years by
Fighting for Albania's freedom,
Clothed or threadbare, fed or hungry.
While they sliced up one another,
While they made a mess and bloodbath,
Did he rush into their midst and
Like a serpent strike against them,
Firing all the time his pistol
At some soldier born in Asia,
Then unfurled Albania's banner,
Crying out: "Long live Albania!"
Hearing him, the Turks retreated,
Leaving fifty dead behind them,
All were fine lads, best of fighters,
Of the wounded do not ask, for
Woe is me, but also perished
In the fray Nikë Gjelosh Luli,
Seventh 'mongst them, peerless fellow,
None within our land his equal.
In the sky from Veleçik then
Near Shipshanik something echoed,
As the sun rose in its glory.
What it is, I'd like to find out.
Rowing on a moonless night
Upon the water by Samoborr,
On that one side of the lake did
Disembark a full battalion,
Pouring out twelve hundred soldiers,
Bringing with them arms and rations,
Lads whose teeth could bite through iron.
Straightaway they stormed upon us,
Some with shoes and others barefoot.
For Shipshanik they were destined,
To assist those Turkish soldiers,
Like a herd of sheep surrounded.
Just like eagles at a carcass
Hoti, Gruda, both assaulted
From behind the Turkish soldiers,

Scattered them into the bushes.
What is wrong with Bedri Pasha,
Ever plucking at his whiskers?
Where has all this anger come from?
Slain's the *kajmekam* of Lezha!
While the rifles, cannons cackled
In the hills, the *kajmekam* moved
Out and left for Bregumatja,
With him was an armed battalion,
Mules full laden with gunpowder,
For the soldiers' bread and rations.
Through the marshland did he journey
To collect there tithes and taxes,
From Patok to Bregumatja,
Giving no one time, remission.
Deda, Coku's son, when hearing
That the *kajmekam* was coming,
On his horse from Lezha riding,
Sent his children, wife in hiding.
With his friends and other rebels
Did he, fine and noble hero,
Press on and prepare an ambush.
There they waited with their weapons,
Swore and promised one another
They would use them 'gainst the Turks to
Expel Turkey from Albania.
How the stallion trotted neighing,
Curved its neck and bent its tail up,
Foaming at the mouth, all yellow,
Back and forth it pranced and frolicked,
Three white hooves, a mark on brow, the
Kajmekam sat on it smoking,
Savage thoughts and morbid glances,
As the column marched before him,
With the line of mules behind him,
Mountain-high their backs were laden.
When they reached a certain hilltop
Somewhere right across from Zejmen,
To descend to Bregumatja,
Deda rose up from his ambush,
Crying loudly to the soldiers:
"Anyone who is Albanian,

Jump to one side, no delaying,
For our fight is just with Stamboul!"
Then the rifles started firing,
First to die, the *kajmekam*
Was hit and fell into the rushes.
Never will he, poor wretch, venture
Out to gather tithes in Talja,
For those Lekas were his downfall.
Further fighting broke out, raging,
Echoed in the din and clamour,
Made the coastline shudder when, like
Beasts come from the wild, the Highland
Men attacked the sultan's army.
Wretched soldiers in the fences
Died, as in the swamps and ditches,
While they ran o'er creeks and pathways,
Fleeing up and down the country,
Dressing mothers up in mourning.
Then the mules were taken captive,
Heavy-laden with gunpowder,
Burdened with the bread and rations.
How the Turks were hard-pressed, harried
When that fighter, Llesh Nikë Daka,
Rushed onto the field of battle,
Started firing at the soldiers.
Thus, he well avenged a farmer
And an in-law and her daughter
Whom a Turk had killed or injured
In the midst of Llesh's household.
In that battle nineteen fighters
From the Highlands fell as martyrs,
Of the soldiers dropped five score and
Eighty-seven on that wasteland.
Poor Albania, e'er in sorrow,
For the soldiers, who in Talja
Fell, were 'venged by the *Jallija*
Down in Durrës when the Highland
Fighters, come from Bregumatja
Under Deda, Llesh Nikë Daka,
Set off in the twilight marching
Down to Durrës to attack and
Drive the Turks out, in the fortress,

As the *Jallija* had promised,
To unfurl the red-black banner.
When the fighters got to Rrushkull,
They fell victim to an ambush
Sprung for them by the *Jallija*,
Thus renouncing faith and *besa*,
When it joined the Turkish soldiers.
Thus, the Highlanders were slaughtered,
The *Jallija* had betrayed them,
When it set that day an ambush,
Let the Turks remain in Durrës!
On that day did fall as martyrs
For the freedom of Albania
Kolec Marku, mountain eagle,
And Gjokë Doda, foremost hero,
Zef Harapi, Shkodra's singer,
Who, though still at home a youngster,
Took to arms to save his country
And was slain there by the wayside,
Prêlë Delija, lightning hero,
And Tomë Gjugji, Mark Prengë Dudi,
Preng Nkollë Gjeçi, Mark Per Zefi,
And with them Gjekë Marash Haka,
Lads as daring as a *zana*,
Bravest of them Llesh Nikë Daka,
Seven-headed that *kulshedra*
Snorting, wading in flood waters.
Llesh Nikë Daka who was wounded
When three bullets whistled through him,
Hollered out to his companions,
As he lay upon his Mauser:
"This I beg you, my companions,
Bear me off upon a stretcher,
Take me to the Church of Rubik,
To the Church of the Franciscans,
For confession and last unction,
To be buried in the churchyard."
So they took him to inter him,
Father Paul was struck with sorrow.
With his hand upon his forehead
Did he mumble, almost weeping,
"Oh Albania, poor Albania,

I'm afraid that you will always
Have your head stuck in the ashes,
Now that from your womb have risen
Serpents such who faith and *besa*
Put behind them, thus betraying
Their own brothers in such bloodshed,
Give our land to foreign powers,
Give Albania up to Turkey,
Which since life on earth's existed
Has done nothing but destroy it,
Has but ruined, all things cast out
In an endless watery chasm."
Then they hailed from far a doctor,
One from Dibra, to assist him,
But the life of Llesh was shortened.
He confessed, to God submitting,
Then he closed his eyes and perished.
When the hero died and passed on,
Son of Scanderbeg, a Christian,
Did the nobles of the country
Hasten to him, stroke his forehead,
Long lamenting, did they mourn him:
"Far and wide your friends have gathered,
Why lie stiffly like a beech trunk?
Get up, rise and speak before us,
Rise and give our young men courage,
Speak with Nikë, your aged father.
Cannonballs have never scared you,
Smoke and powder never sapped you,
When you struck the Turks like lightning.
But when you did meet your brothers,
They fired many volleys at you,
Did not kill you, broke your heart though,
Yes, it clove your heart in twain to
Know your brothers had betrayed you!"
Then they put to rest the hero,
Buried him up on a cliff side
Where the rebels after warfare
With the *shkjas* and Turks took shelter,
Found a place to rest, recover,
Food and comfort from a Brother
Who attended to the injured,

As he washed their wounds and dressed them,
Giving good advice and counsel.
Everyone from Sallsatik down
To Saint Mark's was granted refuge
At the Convent of Rubik, both
Men of letters, valiant fighters,
Christians, Muslims, all who strove to
Drive the Turks out of Albania.
Kthella, Mirdita, Kurbin, Kruja,
Zhuba by Lezha and Zadrima.
Never did Zadrima give the
Turks a respite, they were *rayah*,
Always Christians, much they suffered
Through the ages. Now the time had
Come, however, that they rise up
Against Turkey, seize their weapons
And attack her. All the chiefs and
Elders of Zadrima gathered,
Left their homes, forsook their food stocks,
Left their horses with their saddles,
Full their corn cribs and their buckets,
Fields of grain all ripe for harvest,
Stables full of cows and oxen,
Sheep and goats, and wool and linen.
They brought food up to the rebels,
In the heat they gave them shelter,
Fled as rebels to the mountains,
Some with sons and some whole hamlets.
To the hills took Mati Gjoka,
Prenkë Matija come from Milot,
Both Zef Prêçi and Lekë Ndoka,
Gjo' Ndue Vokrri, ancient fighter,
Marka Tuku, savage wolf he,
Mark Pashuku, Shtjef' Haberi,
Kin Ndoci and Gjokë Dodë Goshi,
Gjoka Tuku and Ndrecë Leci,
Men who battled with the army
In Hajmel, Kallmet, Rraboshta.
In the meantime down in Shkodra,
Turgut Pasha of the Committee
Brought forth seventy battalions.
When he thus turned up in Shkodra,

Trumpets blazed and drums were beaten.
He sent word up to the Highlands,
Ordered them to come to Shkodra
In five days to lay their arms down,
Otherwise he'd, like an arrow,
Hard pursue them with his army,
With his fist he'd smash their faces,
Raze their homes and their foundations,
From the fireplace to the kennels,
Leaving not a rooster crowing,
Hang the people from the gallows.
When the Highland elders heard this,
Who on Turkey'd turned their rifles
For the freedom of Albania:
Dedë Gjo' Luli, lucid speaker,
Sokol Baci, careful thinker,
Mirash Luca, expert marksman,
Mehmet Shpendi, canyon wolf he,
Frano Pali, Mirash Pali,
Like two bullets in a flintlock,
With Tomë Nika, mountain she-bear,
And Lukë Marku, lightning archer,
And with Islam Makalushi,
Shkodra's Luigj Gurakuqi,
Did the heroes meet, assemble.
On their feet and not delaying,
Did they send word back to Turgut:
"By God, Pasha, you consider,
Think yourself a mighty hero,
But we've not the least intent on
Coming down to meet you ever.
We do not accept, like others,
That the Turks reign in this region.
Such words here you'll ne'er hear spoken.
We don't want the Turks to govern,
We demand that they withdraw and
Leave us masters of our country,
So that we'll be in position,
Later on, our land to govern,
Rule it just the way we want to.
Therefore, Pasha, not until you
Turn around and leave the country,

Can a deal be made between us,
Not unless we bash our heads in,
For we know well what your kind is."
Turgut Pasha was in anger,
To its feet he called the army,
Sent it forth against the Highlands,
One flank off to Veleçik and
Off to Shipshanik the other.
Like the waves, all foaming, frothing,
When they break against a cliff side,
Booming, roaring with a fury,
Sending surf into the heavens,
So the Turkish army battered,
When it broke into the Highlands,
To the roar of rifles, cannons,
That you'd lose your mind in panic.
Careful now, oh Dedë Gjo' Luli,
For the Empire's sending storm clouds,
It will be a day of carnage
Which you'll never see the end of.
Can't you hear them, can't you see them,
For the soldiers, those black ravens,
From all sides they are upon you?
This is not some Slavic unit,
It's the hordes of Stamboul's sultan.
Save your skin if you can manage,
In an ox horn try to cower,
For I see no other exit.
Turgut Pasha is determined
But scorched earth to leave behind him,
Angry frown his bushy eyebrows.
Come along now, Turgut Pasha,
With the help of the Almighty
I'll expel you from the Highlands,
From the Highlands and Albania,
No time now for empty bragging
On the road down which you've ventured.
Of a sieve a wolf's unwary,
Flee as long as you have time to.
This is now the last occasion
You'll engage in war and battle
With some real Albanian fighters,

Who are true to their traditions.
Yes, they're ready for you, Pasha,
They will weave a web around you,
Stifle all your force and cunning.
Turkish forces lunged in fury,
Bravely did the Highlands answer.
Where they smashed against each other
Veleçik was shaken, shattered,
So clangorous was the uproar,
Such the shrieking and the crying,
As they struck at one another!
Shots were flashing from the rifles,
Baneful cannons roared like thunder,
Blasting heads off many fighters,
Shearing skulls off in the bloodbath.
Some were slain on promontories,
Others fell on flat land, hillsides,
Starved, and thirsted some for water,
Streams of blood sloshed o'er their bodies,
No one there for words of comfort.
Aloberta fire and brimstone,
Heath lands shuddered near Vitoja,
Naplli Hill was smoke-enveloped,
Veleçik and Broja thundered,
Bukoviq roared in the distance,
Pall up to the peak of Quku,
As the Turks assaulted Deçiq,
As they rushed in from Kalturku.
Prêlë Nikë Prêtashi from Kushja,
Known for deeds of martial courage,
And Zef Peri, she-bear's cub he,
All his bullets bit their targets,
Well he aimed and well he cracked the
Head of Captain Saladini,
Fired a ball right through his temples,
Left him sprawling in a torrent.
What said Pjeter Nikë Daku?
"Game is over, Sinan Aya,
Now two streams of blood adorn you,
Little chance you'll e'er return home!"
And Prêlë Keri, three hearts in him,
Came, departed like a windstorm,

In the fray he e'er rushed forwards
Midst the bayonets and bullets.
From the ocean a *kulshedra*
Rising, Maça Grizhi bellowed:
"Strike, oh lads, the sultan's soldiers,
For, alas, Dokë Lani's fallen."
Now Kolë Zefi, cunning fox, who,
Left but traces of a serpent,
With Kolë Kurti took Bratila,
To the troops he brought confusion,
Ruthlessly he slew the soldiers,
Scythed them, sheaves along the wayside,
To the Turks he dealt destruction,
Left on foreign soil their fighters.
Why are cannons, mortars ever
Blasting from the Pass of Ungrej?
Gjet' Mark Ujka, that *kulshedra*,
With his son has set upon them.
Watch out closely, sultan's gunner!
Are you blind? Can you not see what's
Happened to the Empire's soldiers,
Now that Gjet' Mark has attacked them?
Like a farmer who in food stocks
Finds a horde of mice and seizes,
Takes his hoe and starts to thrash them,
Beats them to a pulp to kill them,
Gjet' Mark Ujka with his sons did
Fell to earth the Turkish soldiers,
Without mercy, no distinctions,
Shot them as wild beasts are hunted.
Yet one gunner, what misfortune!
He indeed an expert marksman,
Pointed, aiming well his cannon,
With the son blew him to pieces.
How Gjon Ujk Miculi lunged out,
Lulash Zeka and Stakë Breci,
Lik Mirashi, Gjokë Dedë Luli,
Gjon Ujk Çeku, Kolë Gjo' Leci,
Lucë Gjeloshi, mountain beast he,
Dasha Nika, Pjeter Uci,
Smajl Mustafa, Sokol Mali,
Gjokë Dedë Luli, Gjo' Nik Plluci.

All the heroes roared while racing
Like the steers o'er fallow pastures,
Throat to throat the Turks they grappled,
With their Mauser rifles shot them.
"*Ileri*," cried the commander,
Forwards rushed the Turkish soldiers,
Stormed the Albanians, fire a-spewing
From the barrels of their Mausers.
From Samoborr to Zagorja
Was the land a raging lime pit,
Mountains groaned and hillsides grumbled,
Chasms, canyons loudly echoed,
Cannons, mortars ever firing,
Cannonballs did pelt like hailstones
Somewhere near Drogani as the
Turks and Highland fighters grovelled.
Et'hem Pasha from Gucia
Sent his troops into Kelmendi,
Turgut started out from Spîja,
Burning, torching all the country,
Clouds of smoke did upwards billow,
Farms were razed to their foundations,
Everywhere his fury struck them
Leaving not a rooster crowing.
Step by step the Turks advanced and
Piece by piece they seized the country,
And subdued it with their soldiers,
Foot by foot in blood they bathed it.
All of Europe watched in wonder,
Highlanders with naught but rifles,
Saw them, without food and cannons,
Hold back seventy battalions.

Canto 29

THE BALKAN WAR

The Austrian Emperor Franz Josef counsels the Sultan to leave the Albanians alone, as he is destined to have more trouble with them than he imagines. The Tsar of Russia incites his fellow Slavs to make war on the Turks, and the Balkan War of 1912 begins. The Bulgarians are the ones to profit from the Turkish defeat and, once again, the Slavs set upon Albania. The King of England invites the other six kings, symbolizing the Great Powers, to the Conference of London to settle the matter once and for all.

In his throne room spoke Franz Josef:
"Padishah, long life be with you,
Do not maltreat the Albanians,
Do not let your pashas at them
To destroy, annihilate them.
Since you recently invaded,
Entering those wretched Highlands.
There you found a group of humans
Whom you've treated very harshly.
If you ask me my impression,
They'll not wait to cause you problems,
Surely they'll cause you a headache,
Do believe me, it is likely
They'll not be to your advantage.
Better sell them off than buy them,
To no good were born those beings.
As to making trouble, you'll find
Nowhere a more boorish people,
More hotheaded and pugnacious.
Yes, that handful of poor folk is
Ready throat-to-throat to grapple,
Even with a king or sultan,
When and how the gadfly stings them.
They're today demanding freedom,
Want to have a free Albania,
By themselves desire to rule it,
Want no longer foreign powers,
Want no longer tithes and taxes,

Who can blame them? For some time now
You have left them without masters,
Hurled upon them ruthless tyrants,
Murderers have run the country.
Up to now for poor Albania,
Which has served you well in warfare,
Muslims, Christians all together,
You've built naught, just razed and ravaged,
Burnt and torched, destroyed the land, that
Mice within the walls weep for it,
Serpents under stones take pity.
So I think, in my opinion,
You'd do well to give them freedom.
Better that they're free and friendly
Than to keep them slaves and hostile.
Yet, there's something I'm afraid of,
I think one day you will need them,
Not today, but, yes, tomorrow,
In the air I smell gunpowder..."
Padishah lay in his harem:
"Friend beloved, long life to you,
Well it seems to me you've spoken,
I agree with your suggestion,
Yet, there is a problem with it,
Two-thirds of the population
Of Albania are now Muslims,
Therefore, your suggestion's faulty.
Our religion will not suffer
(lest it be forced by misfortune,
By some weakness or disaster)
Muslim folk to leave the Empire,
Make their country independent.
Nonetheless, will I consider
What you've said and hold assembly,
Let the issue be debated,
See it reach a fair conclusion,
I'm not wont to rush a matter."
As the sultan prone lay musing,
Lay reflecting, ruminating,
Snoozing, snoring in his harem,
As had been his recent custom,
Did the hairy-nosed Franz Josef

Muse on what the tsar had told him.
In a jiffy did he jostle,
To his feet jumped like a giant,
Called upon the Balkan *shkjas* to
Set forthwith upon the sultan,
Strike without delay at Turkey,
Have the Turks and *shkjas* do battle.
Otherwise he'd lose control of
All the Turkish lands in Europe,
Forfeit influence in Albania,
Lose its neighbour, Macedonia.
He, the Emperor of Austria,
Balding head, but wits a-sharpened,
Had sent word to Stamboul's sultan
To grant freedom to Albania,
Let it have its independence.
"When Albania gets its freedom,
Which Vienna dearly hopes for,
All of you down in the Balkans
Will then feed upon the carcass,
Leaving naught left over for me
But a forlorn, sombre shadow."
When the news spreads in some village
That a wild boar's been detected
In a forest on a hillside,
Or on flat land in the thickets,
To their feet will leap the peasants,
Seize their hounds and wield their weapons,
Summon to the hunt each other,
Hasten out in the direction
Where the beast had first been sighted,
Shouting all the time and laughing.
Thus the peoples of the Balkans,
All of them bonded together,
To their feet rose helter-skelter,
Grasped and girded on their weapons,
Brought out cannons and machine guns,
Recalled consuls, emissaries,
Refused prisoners, mediation,
Wished for only war with Turkey.
But the Turks now were not sleeping,
Hands in laps and eyes turned skywards,

They'd been always fearless fighters.
Thus they tucked their sleeves up, coming
With their troops from Asia Minor,
Mustered Llaps and Tosks and Arabs,
Mustered Africans, Circassians,
Sharpened all their swords and sabres,
Hastened to the war grounds, facing
All the princes of the Balkans.
If the road had led you, brother,
Here to see the forces struggle,
See the Turks and *shkjas* in battle,
See them fighting, see them grapple,
Like the giants and the vampires,
How those vampires fought in fury,
In your shirt your body'd quiver,
Hearkening to hillside cannons,
Hearing rifles and machine guns,
Never-ceasing din and clamour,
With the infantry and horsemen,
All in wrathful mood attacking,
Some with swords and some with sabres,
Shkja and Turkish voices crying,
In loud shrieks as is their custom,
Burning, torching all the Balkans,
Pools of human blood creating.
Clouds of smoke did billow upwards,
Underfoot the earth did shudder,
As if earth and heaven'd caved in,
That you'd curse your own existence.
Some advanced and some retreated,
Slavs assaulting, Turks assailing,
Both inciting, pushing, fighting
Forwards in the fray and folly,
At each other's throats a-shredding,
Turks and *shkjas* in savage battle,
Tearing with their fangs and molars
In a ball with one another,
Like the vipers in the thickets,
Or like boars at one another
Flaying, slashing in the slaughter,
Using fangs and snouts as weapons,
O'er them handbreadth manes arising.

Seeing them, you'd freeze in horror.
Savage thus the fighting raged,
Bulgarians were crazed, in fury,
How they gnashed incisors, molars,
Loudly crying to their fellows:
"Onwards, fighters, on to Stamboul,
In the fray now use your weapons!"
Like a boulder on a cliff side
In the lofty mountains falling,
Plummeting into the valley,
Crashing, booming, and cascading,
Ricocheting off the rocks and
Rolling, spinning down the canyon,
Taking with it rocks and tree trunks,
Breaking walls, destroying stables,
'til with final fury plunging
Downwards to a racing torrent,
To a creek or some great river,
Sending foam into the heavens,
Thus did headlong the Bulgarians,
Blood and gall did seethe within them,
Eyes a-glowing, hearts gunpowder,
Fall upon the Turkish fighters.
Praise be to you, God Almighty,
When they mingled - fire, explosives -
When the Turks met the Bulgarians,
How the fighting flamed, erupted,
How the rifles cracked in volleys,
How the din and clamour echoed.
Shrieking, shouting, cannons roaring,
Swept the country like a tempest.
Savagely the Black Sea thundered,
Heard in Bucharest, Vienna,
Just as when collide two mountains.
Loudly calling, rushed the captains,
Neighing, snorting sped the coursers,
Cannons, mortars ever rumbling,
Cannonballs did pelt like hailstones,
Or like thunder, lightning striking,
Robbing heads and minds of reason.
To the torch was put Rumelia,
Beasts and humans screeching, screaming

In the storm and conflagration.
Landslides tumbled down the mountains,
Walls and stables, barns and hamlets,
Cities swept away to ruins,
Making homes for snakes and vipers.
All the land was in an uproar,
Shouting, shrilling, hailing, howling
Storm winds squalling, all the clamour
Of the war cries and the crackling,
Seemed the Balkan lands to shatter.
O'er the soil lay all the wounded,
Face-down prostrate stretched their bodies,
In a pool of blood, their making,
With their hands were numbly groping,
All around them, slowly prodding,
More like larvae in a tree stump.
How they grimaced, groaned as giant
Coursers galloped o'er their bodies,
Heavy iron wheels of cannons
Squished and squelched their lungs, intestines
Over trees and over boulders,
Stones would bleed in pity for them.
Red with blood flowed the Maritsa,
Scarlet gushing maelstroms, eddies,
Sanguine, too, the mighty Danube.
Clouds of smoke did billow upwards,
Veiled in black the vaults of heaven.
Underfoot the earth did shudder,
Gave a groan, you'd think an earthquake'd
Ripped apart the planet's bowels.
Pall and fire wrapped and darkened
All the world as these two monsters,
Savage Balkan hydras grappled,
Fierce Turks and Bulgarian heroes,
Who before they'd reached the war grounds,
Who before they'd caused the carnage,
Swore a sacred oath among them,
Turk on Koran, cross Bulgarian,
That they'd ever fire their rifles
'til they had inflamed the Balkans,
Made the land a raging lime pit,
'til they'd stamped out one another,

Kicked the foe right in the belly,
Torn by force the soul out of him!
Like two storm clouds on a winter's
Night, one from the south a-blowing,
By the north wind sent the other,
When they meet up in the heavens,
In the air joust as opponents
With the mighty force behind them,
Like in fury two *kulshedras*
Each one grim, its foe assaulting,
Chasing one another, flames and
Fire from both their jaws a-spewing,
Bolts of lighting all around them
Giving way to horrid thunder,
Causing land and sea to echo.
By the gale force were uprooted
Forests: fir and beech and pine, like
Driftwood scattered in the gravel.
Boulders from the cliffs did tumble,
Plunging into mountain torrents,
Carried down the chasms, canyons,
'til they reached the lowland valleys.
Thus made war Turks and Bulgarians,
Ever pounding at each another,
Leaving one another bloodied.
Dust and flames and black smoke swirling
Did surround, enwrap the fighters.
Rifles, cannons raged around them
As they lunged in fury forwards,
Tried devouring one another.
Tragically the heavens rumbled
That you'd think they'd fall upon you,
Smash into a thousand pieces.
When the Turkish might was broken,
When they turned, retreating homewards,
All were bathed in blood and beaten,
As they safety sought in Stamboul.
Right behind them the Bulgarians,
Rifles, cannons at them belching,
'til they got to Çatalca where
Any man could pick a stone up,
Chucking it with ease at Stamboul.

Like a river overflowing
When engulfed by snowy landslides,
Like the mountain torrents flowing
Down into the fields of gravel,
Thus the Slavs attacked Albania,
Kaçanik, the Adriatic,
Veleçik and Salonica,
Choked the country in their talons,
Slaying, slaughtering, enchaining,
Beating with a club their victims,
Stealing land and snatching booty.
This is how the conflict ended.
When Franz Josef was informed
The Slavs had taken, seized Albania,
He was fuming, full of anger,
Broke out in a rage and fury,
Not delaying, hesitating,
Raised battalions full eight hundred,
Whetted, honed his awesome sabre,
Honed his sabre for the battle,
Sent the Balkan Slavs a message:
"Within eight days, after sunset,
You must be gone from Albania,
If you're not, then be aware that
I'll be on your back, by God, and
I don't know what I'll do with you."
The Italian king was buoyant,
Sent a message to Franz Josef:
"I'm behind you in this matter,
Let us teach those *shkjas* a lesson.
Haughty folk have they turned into,
Raised their heads now to attack us,
Want to rob us of our vision.
Wretched land, that poor Albania,
Nowhere has a friend or patron
Which would lovingly protect it,
Stop the *shkjas* in their invasion,
Crazy souls they, wild and savage,
They will tear that land to pieces,
Thinking they rule over Europe."
England's king was not too happy,
Sent the other kings a message:

"I suggest we do not dally,
Let's in London get together,
Let us talk and make a deal, for
Smoke and fire rage in the Balkans.
On our heads might fall a roof tile,
God forbid! Yes, from the Balkans
Never we'll have peace and quiet.

Canto 30

THE CONFERENCE OF LONDON

After thirty years of work on 'The Highland Lute,' the poet begins his final song with an appeal to the *zana* who has put up with him for so long and chased him back and forth over the pastures of Mount Parnassus. Not without a generous dash of humour and irony does he portray the events of the Conference of London of 1912-1913, at which the 'Seven Kings' discuss the fate of Albania. After much dispute, the participants agree to recognize the newly independent Albanian state. The red and black flag, 'like the wings of all God's angels' now flutters in the breeze over the land of Scanderbeg.

Oh, good *zana*, joy I wish you.
Thirty times around the sun
Through heaven's vaults the earth's rotated,
Just as often April flowers,
Since you've held me in the furrow
Of the Highland Lute, hunched over,
So that you can tell the children
Who in later years will follow,
Sing to them a song heroic,
How Albania's mind was ripened,
To once more seek ancient freedoms,
Handed down from their forefathers,
Tell them, too, of blood and sorrow,
Tell what lies transpired, and treason
'til that land got independence,
As the Lord, our God, had promised.
Now we're nearing the conclusion.
Long you've chased me o'er the pastures
And the passes of Parnassus.
Yes, our song's reached its finale.
Oh, my beauty of the mountain
Meadows, hand in hand we've sung it,
We've a monument erected,
One withstanding time and weather.
In the distant town of London
All the Seven Kings have gathered,
Meeting there with one another,

Come to talk about Albania,
Speaking out in order, with the
English king who heads the table.
Yes, indeed, my fair Albania,
You possess a clever *ora*.
Tiny country, folk a handful,
Not related to the others,
Fed or hungry, and yet of you
Did the Seven Kings take notice,
All of which to London hastened,
There to meet with one another,
There to talk and find a way to
Make the country independent,
From the *shkjas* and Turks to free it,
Place a crown upon its forehead,
Let it shine as once it used to.
Nonetheless, the time will come when
God will strike with bolts the Seven
Kings in London all assembled,
Since for years five hundred they have
Let the Turks oppress the country,
Let its spirit wither, 'til this year the
Shkjas could rise and strike it.
Both the blood of all your children
And the tears you've wept, oh mother,
Are now seething and demanding
Of our mighty Lord a judgment.
The King of England, clever man he,
Good at splitting hairs in twain, and,
Yet, methinks, perfidious fellow,
Put his finger to his forehead,
Weighing in advance his phrases,
Then he got up and addressed them:
"How shall we deal with this matter,
For we're in a pinch, good heroes,
With Albania, worse than ever.
When those rifles, cannons, mortars
Started firing in the Balkans,
When the carnage started spreading,
Turks and *shkjas* in savage combat,
And when Turkey came to notice
It might fail and lose Albania

To the *shkjas*, who war had started,
Did it counsel take in Stamboul,
Giving us in trust Albania,
On its fate that we pass judgment
Fairly, no one's side a-taking.
Should we give it independence,
Make it free, or should we rather
'mongst the Slavs divide it, doling
To each brother his own fiefdom,
So to speak, in four parts chop it,
Thus not leaving any mix-up?
For I fear that, since the *shkjas* are
Stubborn, they'll be unpersuaded
To release it without battle
After having occupied it.
Thus I sent you all a message
That you come at once to London,
That we here decide together
What to do now with Albania
Which the Turks entrusted to us,
That we somehow solve the issue."
"May the Lord confound them!" fiercely
Cried the King of the Italians.
"For by God, and praise be to Him,
This deed is unparalleled, as
Over years five hundred have the
Poor Albanians suffered badly
In the service of the sultan,
Some by paying tithes and taxes,
Some their lives in danger placing,
None cared much for their existence.
In their blood was bathed all Turkey
For each handbreadth of the country.
Now that Turkey can no longer
Keep beneath its yoke Albania,
(Ne'er a good deed have they done and
Ne'er in living memory have they
On this earth raised up a people,
Only kicked them and oppressed them,
Burning, roasting, torching, slaying)
Rather than to grant it freedom,
Ere they with the *shkjas* did battle,

To the diplomats they gave it,
Not to see it live unshackled ."
What said now the King of Moscow?
"Yes, indeed, the Turks in Stamboul,
In the past and in the present,
Always have they been a danger
To our freedom and our culture.
Grass won't grow, as is the saying,
Where Turks tread and where they've trodden.
What I'd like to tell you here is
That we've no need to debate or
Solve the problems of Albania.
It is done, the matter's over,
By the Balkan Slavs decided,
By the rifle barrel, sabre.
It is better you keep silent,
For, as men, did they do battle,
Kicked the Turks hard in the belly,
Left them on the ground a-sprawling
Where the wretches lay there coughing
Like the crows amongst the jackdaws
From the beating they had suffered.
I am not sure where their heads are.
But there's one thing, my companions,
Which is causing me amazement.
Why this talk about Albania,
Which in Europe no one's heard of?
I don't understand the reason
Why we're wasting all our time here.
Why throw oil upon the bonfire?
There was Turkey in the Balkans
Which the Slavs, thank God, truncated,
Leaving blood-bathed all that country.
That I knew, but this I didn't:
That somewhere upon this planet
There's a country called Albania."
Franz Josef, still seated, answered:
"If you didn't, I can tell you,
For that country which from Shkodra
Down the coastline southwards stretching
To Janina was not conquered,
Arms in hand, by Turkish forces,

As were taken Greece and Serbia
Which has risen like a vampire,
Casts a shadow over Europe.
With a tribal *besa*, Turkey
Promised to respect their freedom,
Faith and language, *Kanun*, custom.
All alone they would be left and
By themselves would rule the country,
As the Turks bore witness often,
And events today have proven
In Ghegnia and the Highlands,
Which themselves rule as they used to.
It was said, too, that for Turkey
The Albanians would do battle,
In addition, every year, that
They would pay a modest tribute.
Just because the Turks did slowly
Break their word and break their *besa*,
Did go back on what they promised,
This does not mean that the country
In the eyes of reason, justice,
Has now overstepped the freedoms
Which once Turkey granted to it.
Now this country's (may it flourish)
Called Albania 'round the planet.
Thus, aside from Turkey, there was
In the Balkans an Albania,
Land which Austria and Italy
(by the grace of God Almighty)
Ne'er will let the *shkjas* take over,
Though they're like wild boars rapacious."
Now the President of France, who
Always was a troublemaker,
Spoke in nasal tones, announcing:
"Yes, the situation was once
As you say, but things have changed now.
Once it was a Christian country,
All Albania, and would never
With the Turks have made a *besa*
Freely, but, like a *kulshedra,*
Turkey did attack, invade it,
Heaving at its throat a hay rake,

Bit it like a snake or viper,
In a deep well did it drown them.
Now the situation's different,
Rare have now become the Christians
In Albania (long life to them).
If we want to tell the truth, we
Must admit, this land which stretches
Now from Shkodra to Janina
Can no more be called Albania
As they one time may have called it
In the age of Castriota.
One might claim that all Albania
Took to arms and went to battle,
Roaring, blowing like a tempest,
Snowstorm raging, rainstorm beating,
Steeled in hardship like a pitchfork,
Always with the *shkjas* in conflict,
Just to keep their land in Turkey.
Only when Bulgarian forces
Got to Çatalca, beat Turkey,
Did they, rank and file, fill Vlora.
You inspired them, they admit it.
There, some rag, all red and black, they
Stuck upon a pole and waved it.
Tied the pole onto a villa,
And commenced to sing before it,
Saying that they loved Albania
And Albanians were and would be.
Majesties, they can't deceive us,
Minds enough we have for thinking,
Eyes we have, too, for observing."
The King of the Italians countered:
"But you French did once do battle,
Brothers killing one another,
Even women in the struggle,
Torching, set the world on fire,
Not for any lofty purpose,
Blithe religion, unkept promise,
Sister or your mother's honour,
But to bring to France the English!
Should for this we start discussing
How to alter France's borders,

Hand your country to your neighbours?
No, my Lord, you're talking nonsense,
For it's true, and long life to them,
Off to war did go the Muslims
Not for selling kerchiefs dearly,
As we often do in Europe,
But to fight for their religion.
You're aware in wars of faith that
Tribe and country, language, customs
Are of no importance, rather
Wars are waged for an ideal,
For the triumph of religion,
This is why men go to battle.
You've no grounds on which to waiver,
Not to grant its independence,
Not to give that land its freedom,
Just because Albania's Muslims,
Be they volunteers or soldiers,
Were not fighting for Albania,
But for Turkey and the sultan,
For a country which was Muslim,
With which they shared their religion.
Certainly there were some Muslims
Who did suffer tribulation,
Who did suffer much from Turkey,
For the freedom of Albania.
They were exiled, robbed and beaten,
Some were shot and others poisoned,
They denied not, though, their country,
Sacrificed their lives, possessions."
Franz Josef was now impatient,
Pounded on the conference table,
Booming forth, did he assail them:
"Five-score words are worth a penny!
Either we set up this kingdom
Or I'm straight off to Vienna.
I'll tomorrow before sunset
Send my army to the Balkans.
With the sharp point of my sabre,
With the help of God and Italy,
I will draw Albania's borders,
There is no one who can stop me.

For the words of France and Russia,
Yes, their speeches here before us,
Nothing are but empty babble,
Gossip columns for the dailies,
Not for such a royal gath'ring
Which the fate of states determines
Like the one we are convoking,
With the world's eyes fixed upon us,
Hoping we can in the Balkans
Unload rifles, cannons, mortars,
Act with wisdom and with justice,
Settle conflict, stifle hatred,
Peace and brotherhood promoting."
To his feet arose the leader,
Hastened to the door, departing.
From his chair sprang also Wilhelm,
Rushed towards the door to halt him,
Stopped his good old friend from leaving,
Mighty Kaiser of the Germans,
In the job of mediation,
In the role of manly valour.
With the King of England did he
Calm down France and calm down Russia,
Try to find a compromise
Appeasing Italy and Austria,
Swore by God and by the *oras*,
'til at last the thread was found and
All the Seven Kings agreed to
Make Albania independent.
And when stubborn Prince Nikolla
Using rifles, using money,
Would not leave, thus freeing Shkodra,
How the Seven Kings were angered,
Sent to Shkodra naval vessels.
When the admirals arrived, they
By the ear grabbed Prince Nikolla,
Mugged the Montenegrin and
Propelled the fellow out of Shkodra.
Such the cries of joy in Shkodra
That the Padishah took notice:
"Is a thunderstorm a-brewing,
Could it be a war is raging

That this din should rend the heavens?
You'd think there's some celebration."
What did the Grand Mufti answer?
"By your life, there is no lightning,
Nor are there new wars a-raging,
What you hear is jubilation,
The Albanians celebrating.
In that distant town of London
Did the Seven Kings assemble,
Meeting there with one another.
They at last resolved to give to
The Albanian folk their freedom,
Make Albania independent.
This is why the castles' cannons
Of Albania are now booming,
Red and black, the banner's flying
For the first time in its beauty,
Like the wings of all God's angels,
O'er the land of Castriota,
Waving now as it once used to."
To the heavens soared the cheering,
Highlands, lowlands, both in rapture,
Long, forever live Albania!
In this way, through trial and torment,
After bloodshed and much slaughter,
Of the Balkan Slavs defiant,
Causing sorrow to the sultan,
Did Albania taste its freedom
And fulfilled was thus God's promise.

Glossary

Abazi, Is
Highland warrior.

Abdul Hamid
Abdul Hamid II (1842-1918) was Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1909 when he was deposed by the Young Turks.

Aga
Originally an Ottoman title for officials. Alb. *aga*, derived from Turkish *aga*.

Agron
Illyrian ruler and king of Shkodra from ca. 250 to 231 B.C. Agron financed his Illyrian kingdom centred around Shkodra on piracy. His ships plundered Greek and Roman vessels in the Adriatic as far south as Epirus and Greece. In alliance with Demetrius II of Macedonia, he defeated the Aetolians in Acarnania in 231 and died after the battle due to a heavy bout of drinking. He was succeeded by his wife, Queen Teuta. Many men in Albania today bear the name Agron in honour of this ancient Illyrian king.

Alexander
The reference is to King Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who in Albanian legendry is regarded as an ancestor of the Albanians.

Ali Pasha of Gucia
Ali Pasha (d. 1885) descended from the Shabanagaj family of Gucia. Although illiterate, he obtained the title of pasha in the Ottoman armed forces. He took part in the League of Prizren and was assigned by it to defend Plava and Gucia against the Montenegrin forces of Mark Milani (Marko Miljanov) in December 1879. Ali Pasha was later appointed *mutasarrif* or governor of Peja, where he was assassinated. The figure of Ali Pasha occurs in Albanian oral verse.

Ali Pasha Tepelena
Ruler and pasha of Janina and southern Albania. Ali Pasha (1744-1822), once known in Europe as the 'Lion of Janina,' was born of a Turkish family from Asia Minor. He served in the Ottoman administration before managing to acquire the stronghold of Janina, now in northern Greece, from where he expanded his reign to take over Epirus, Thessaly and all of southern and central Albania. Here, ca. 1788, he set up a quasi-autonomous principality within the Ottoman

Empire, had an army of his own and maintained diplomatic relations with England, France and Russia, all with a view to creating an independent Albania and Epirus. He was visited among others by Lord Byron, who recorded his meetings with the aging and brutal tyrant. Ali's relations with the Sublime Porte were tenuous but he managed to avoid an open breach for a long time. In 1820, when Sultan Mahmud II relieved him of all his positions and dispatched an army against him, Ali Pasha allied himself with the Greeks who were already in revolt against Ottoman rule. He was eventually captured on an island in Lake Janina and beheaded. Although he was not Albanian himself, Ali Pasha is regarded by many Albanians as a national figure who led the country in the direction of autonomy and independence.

Alia, Gjergj Elez

The legendary hero Gjergj Elez Alia, Bosn. *Alija Djerzelez*, Turkish *Gürz Ilyas,* would seem to be an historical figure. He first appeared in Turkish land registries as a landowner in the year 1455. According to Rašid Durić, the Turkish chronicler and historian Ibn Kemal (1468-1534) referred to Gürz Ilyas' heroism in the year 1479-1480 and mentioned his popularity in folk verse in Bosnia. Gjergj Elez Alia is at any rate well known to the Albanians and Bosnians as a symbol of fraternal fidelity.

Alltuni, Shas

Highland warrior.

Aloberta

Locality in the District of Malësia e Madhe, situated in Kastrati tribal territory. It is also called *Oloberda*.

Andrijevica

Town in eastern Montenegro on the upper Lim River between Berane and Plava.

Antivari

Alternative name for the Montenegrin port city of Bar.

Arbënia

Poetic term for Albania, also standard Albanian *Arbëria*.

Arianiti

Noble ruling family of central Albania from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. George Arianiti (d. ca. 1463) was an ally and comrade-in-arms of Scanderbeg.

Arifi, Smajl

Highland warrior.

Avdi Pasha

Turkish pasha in Shkodra.

Babi-Ali
Ottoman Turkish term for the 'High Gate,' i.e. the gate of the sultan's palace in Istanbul where justice was administered. This imperial gate gave rise to the term of French origin - 'Sublime Porte,' referring to the seat of government of the Ottoman Empire in general.

Babiq, Petko
Montenegrin warrior.

Babune
Unidentified settlement in Montenegro. There are numerous toponyms in the southwestern Balkans with this root.

Baci, Sokol
Highland warrior.

Bala, Vocerr
Drangue figure and personification of the Highland heroes. *Vocerr* means 'small, little guy.'

Balkan War
During the first Balkan War from October 1912 to May 1913, in which Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro expelled the Turks from most of the southern Balkans, the Albanians found themselves in an extremely awkward position. There had been numerous major uprisings against the Turks in the period 1909-1912, but Albanian leaders were now more concerned about the coalition of neighbouring Christian forces (Montenegro, Serbia and Greece) than they were about the weakened Ottoman military presence in their country. What they wanted was to preserve the territorial integrity of Albania. Within two months, Ottoman forces had all but capitulated, and it was only in Shkodra and Janina that Turkish garrisons were able to maintain position. The very existence of the country was threatened. It was at this time that Ismail Qemal bey Vlora returned to Albania with Austro-Hungarian support and declared Albanian independence in the town of Vlora on 28 November 1912. The declaration was more theoretical than real because Vlora was the only town in the whole country not occupied by coalition forces - yet it proved to be effective in the vacuum of power. The Montenegrins had taken Lezha and Shëngjin and were besieging Shkodra; the Serbs had seized not only Kosova and western Macedonia, but also Dibra, Elbasan, Tirana and Durrës; and the Greeks had invaded Saranda and stationed their forces on the island of Sazan outside the Bay of Vlora. Fighting continued in and around Shkodra from March until May 1913, by which time both Turkish and Serb troops began to withdraw from the country. On 29 July 1913, the Conference of Ambassadors in London resolved that Albania should become a sovereign state ruled by a European prince. Albanian

independence had thus been recognized and the country was only superficially affected by the second Balkan War from July to August 1913.

Ballehana

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'moonlike brow,' from Alb. *ballë*, def. *balli* 'brow, forehead,' and *hana*, standard Alb. *hënë*, def. *hëna* 'moon.'

Bar

Town and port on the southern coast of Montenegro, known in Italian as *Antivari*, lit. 'across from Bari (in Italy).' Alb. *Tivar*, def. *Tivari*.

Barbullush

Settlement twenty kilometres south of Shkodra, at the foot of Mount Kakarriq, known in Fishta's time also as Mount Barbullush. Alb. *Barbullush*, def. *Barbullushi*.

Bardylis

Ruler of ancient Illyria.

Bashibazouk

Irregular Turkish soldier.

Bayrak

Tribe or banner. Alb. *bajrak*, def. *bajraku*.

Bayraktar

Chief of a tribe, lit. 'standard-bearer.' Alb. *bajraktar*, def. *bajraktari*, is derived from a 'bayrak,' Alb. *bajrak* 'banner, tribe.'

Bayram

Muslim feast. There are actually two Bayrams in Islam: Great Bayram, Alb. *Bajram i Madh*, known in Turkish as *Büyük Bayram* and in Arabic as *'Aîd al kabîr*, during which every Muslim is required to sacrifice an animal if he has sufficient means to do so; and Little Bayram, Alb. *Bajram i Vogël*, known in Turkish as *Küçük Bayram* or *Şeker Bayramı* and in Arabic as *'Aîd al saghîr*, which marks the end of *Ramadan*. The latter is a particularly popular celebration because, for devout Muslims, it signifies an end to weeks of fasting. As in Canto 8, to ask someone whether he holds Bayram or Easter is equivalent to asking him whether he is a Muslim or a Christian.

Bedri Pasha

Ottoman commander in Albania.

Begolli

Ruling Muslim family from the vicinity of Peja in Kosova.

Begu, Hodo

cf. Hodo Begu.

Beke

Name of a mountain nymph.

Belaj Settlement west of Shkodra, near the Buna River and the Montenegrin border. It was recorded in 1416 as *Bellani*.

Berane Town in eastern Montenegro, known during the communist period as *Ivangrad*.

Berat Town in central southern Albania. Berat is one of the oldest settlements in Albania and a town of great historical and cultural interest. Founded in the fourth or third century B.C., Berat was known in ancient Greek as *Antipatreia* and in Latin as *Antipatrea*. The early Byzantine term for the town was *Pulcheriopolis* 'beautiful town,' when it became the seat of a bishop under the Emperor Theodosius II (408-450 A.D.). In the Middle Ages, it was successively under Byzantine, Bulgarian (ninth century), Norman (1082-1085), Angevin (1272-), Serb (1346-) and Turkish (1417-) control. The present name of the town derives from the Slavic *beli grad* 'white town,' ~ med. Latin *Belogradum, Bellegradum,* Turkish *Belgrad* (1431), Italian *Belgrado* (1515). To the Venetians, it was known as *Belgrado di Romania* and in Turkish as *Arnavud Belgrad* (1670), to distinguish it from Belgrade in Serbia.

Berdona Name of a mountain nymph.

Berlin, Congress of cf. Congress of Berlin.

Besa Word of honour, a sworn oath, a pledge or a cease-fire. In Albanian culture, the *besa* was regarded as something sacred and its violation was quite unthinkable. It was not only a moral virtue, but also a particularly important institution in Albanian customary law. Among the feuding tribes of the north it offered the only form of real protection and security to be had. A *besa* could be given between individuals or feuding families for a specific period of time in order for them to settle other urgent affairs. It could also be concluded between tribes as a cease-fire between periods of fighting. Alb. *besë*, def. *besa*.

Bey Honorific title and term of respect. A bey was originally the governor of a *sandjak* or *vilayet*.

Bijoca Settlement on the Moraça, northeast of Podgorica in Montenegro, ~ BCS (Serbo-Croatian) *Bioče*.

Binaku, Çerim Highland warrior.

Bishe, Nel

Highland warrior.

Bishi, Arif

Highland warrior.

Bishkazi

Mountain (1,870 m.) northeast of Shkodra, on the border between the District of Malësia e Madhe and the District of Shkodra. Alb. *Bishkaz*, def. *Bishkazi*. The Bishkaz Pass, Alb. *Qafa e Bishkazit* (1,422 m.), is situated southwest of the Bosh Pass, Alb. *Qafa e Boshit*. It leads from the Postriba region and Rrjoll valley, north of Shkodra, in the west, around Mount Bishkazi to Shoshi in the east.

Bjelopole

Settlement in Montenegro, situated east of Vranina on the Moraça River, ~ BCS *Bijelo Polje,* lit. 'white field.' There is also a Bijelo Polje in eastern Montenegro.

Bjela, Llazo

Montenegrin warrior.

Bjeshka

Name of a mountain nymph, from Alb. *bjeshkë*, def. *bjeshka* 'high mountain pastures.'

Black Lleshi

cf. Gjoni, Llesh.

Blood brothers

Popular custom. As in other Balkan countries, two young men who were emotionally attached to one another could decide to become blood brothers for life. William Plomer (1936), biographer of Ali Pasha Tepelena, noted with regard to this institution: "It was customary for young men who were closely attached to each other to swear eternal vows, and that this was not simply a matter of mere sentimentality or sensuality, or both, is shown by the fact that the contract was regarded as sacred and proved more durable than marriage often is with us... for it is said that no instance was ever known of its violation."

Boletini

Settlement, also *Boletin, Buletin, Buletini,* near Mitrovica in northern Kosova. Boletin was the birthplace of nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter, Isa bey Boletini (1864-1916), who was one of the great freedom fighters of Kosova at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1909, Boletini led fighting in Prishtina, Prizren and elsewhere, and played an important role in the general uprising in Kosova in the spring of 1910, where he held Turkish forces at bay in Caraleva, between Ferizaj and Prizren, for two days. During the first Balkan War in 1912, he led armed guerrillas in Kosova and later in Albania proper, in support of the

provisional government which proclaimed Albanian independence in Vlora on 28 November 1912.

Bora
Name of a mountain nymph, from Alb. *borë*, def. *bora* 'snow.'

Boshkoviqi, Ilia
Montenegrin warrior.

Bozhiq
Montenegrin warrior. Uncle of Savo Jukiqi.

Brahimi, Cem
Highland warrior.

Branku, Veshoviq
Montenegrin warrior.

Bratila
Unidentified settlement, possibly in the vicinity of Tuz in Montenegro.

Breci, Stakë
Highland warrior, comrade of Bec Patani.

Bregumatja
Region at the mouth of the Mat River, south of Lezha.

Breshana
Term for an ancient rifle once produced in the northern Italian town of Brescia, hence the name. It was widely used in Albania in the 1875-1885 period. In the Albanian text of the Highland Lute, the author provides no less than twenty-two terms for firearms. Among them are: *allti* or *alltipatllar*, a 'six-shooter' revolver from Turkish *altipatlar*; *calina*, a type of flintlock pistol; *dilke* (q.v.); *dudumja* (q.v.); *dumbar*, a type of double-barrelled revolver; *huta* (q.v.); *karajfilja*, a flintlock musket; *kacaturra*, a bayoneted rifle; *kuburja* or *koburja*, a pistol; *ltina*, an 'Italian' rifle; *martina*, the Martini rifle (q.v.); *mauzerr* or *mauzer*, the 'Mauser' rifle or pistol (q.v.); *mitroljoz*, machine gun; *novica* (q.v.); *patllakja*, a six-shooter revolver; *pushka*, the term for a rifle or gun in general; *pushkaliq*; *shejshana* (q.v.); *xheverdarja*, also called *gjeferdan* or *gjeferlia*, a muzzle-loading flintlock produced in Bosnia; and *zdragusha* (q.v.).

Brezovica
Valley of the upper Lim River, stretching from Plava down to Andrijevica, in southeastern Montenegro. Also a village north of Plava, ~ BCS *Brezojevica*.

Brigje
Settlement, also known as Brigja e Hotit and formerly Brixha. It is situated at the foot of Mount Veleçik between Hoti and Kastrati tribal territory. Alb. *Brigje*, def. *Brigja*.

Broja

Mountain (1,825 m.) situated in Kelmendi tribal territory in the District of Malësia e Madhe, near the village of Broja.

Bubi, Dedel

Highland warrior from Pelaj. Son of Bub Keçota.

Bucharest

Capital city of Romania.

Budapest

Capital city of Hungary.

Budashi

A site, currently used for logging, Alb. *Budash*, def. *Budashi*, situated a few kilometres west of Vermosh in Kelmendi tribal territory in the northernmost part of Albania.

Bukoviq

Mountain (1,231 m.) in Hoti tribal territory, situated between Rapsha e Hotit in Albania and Traboina in Montenegro. It forms part of the Montenegro-Albania border.

Buna

River flowing from Lake Shkodra into the Adriatic. It currently forms part of the political border between Albania and Montenegro. Alb. *Bunë,* def. *Buna,* formerly *Bojana, Boyana.*

Buza e Ujit

Settlement, lit. 'water side.' The reference is possibly to an area along the banks of Lake Shkodra, near Bajza.

Buzuku, Dum

Highland warrior.

Bzheta

Settlement in Shkreli tribal territory in the District of Malësia e Madhe. Alb. *Bzhetë*, def. *Bzheta*. It was recorded in 1416 as *Bersceta*.

Çabrati Hill

Low hill around the town of Gjakova in western Kosova.

Çakavica

Small islet north of Vranina in Lake Shkodra.

Çakorri

Mountain in southeastern Montenegro, situated east of the Lim River between Plava and Velika.

Cali

Highland figure from the Hoti region.

Çamuku, Col

Highland warrior.

Çamuku, Lul

Highland warrior from Merturi.

Çanakkale
Turkish town on the Asiatic side of the Dardanelles.

Cani, Tol
Highland warrior from the Dukagjini region.

Çapaliku
Highland warrior.

Captain
Meant here in the Albanian context as a tribal chieftain or leader of a band of fighters. Alb. *kapitan, kapidan,* def. *kapitani, kapidani.* The term is also common in southern Slavic oral literature, ~ BCS *kapedan.*

Care
Name of a mountain nymph.

Castriota, George
George Castriota, modern Alb. *Gjergj Kastrioti*, was an Albanian prince and national hero (1405-1468), otherwise known as Scanderbeg. For the Albanians, Scanderbeg is the symbol and quintessence of resistance to foreign domination and a source of much inspiration in both oral and written literature. Alb. *Skënderbej,* def. *Skënderbeu.*

Çatalca
A town in European Turkey, about thirty kilometres west of Istanbul. On 17 November 1912, Çatalca was the scene of a thunderous battle between Bulgarian and Ottoman forces during the First Balkan War.

Çeke
Name of a mountain nymph.

Çeku, Gjon Ujk
Highland warrior.

Çela, Adem
Highland warrior.

Çela, Qerim
Highland warrior.

Cem
River flowing from the mountains of northern Albania through Hoti tribal territory into the Moraça, south of the present Montenegrin capital of Podgorica, and from there into Lake Shkodra. Alb. *Cem*, def. *Cemi*, ~ BCS *Cijevna.*

Ceni, Ragip
Highland warrior.

Ceroviq
Montenegrin warrior and leader.

Cernojeviq
Settlement and tribal region in Montenegro at the northern end of Lake Shkodra, around the town of *Rijeka Crnojeviča* 'Crnojevič River.'

Cerrleka

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'spring water.'

Çeta

A band of warriors. Alb. *çetë*, def. *çeta*.

Cetinje

Former mountain capital of Montenegro and traditional residence of the Montenegrin rulers.

Chennar

An oriental plane tree, Lat. *platanus orientalis*. The Albanian term *çinar*, def. *çinari*, is related to the English word.

Church Pass

A mountain pass. The Church Pass, Alb. *Qafë Kishë*, is situated above Vuksanlekaj, on the road between Tuz and the present Albanian border.

Cicmic

A northern Albanian game played by two people moving counters on a board or on the ground, ninepenny morris.

Çiftelia

Musical instrument. The mandolin-like *çiftelia* is a long-necked, two-stringed instrument popular in northern Albania and Kosova, where it is the epitome of folk music. The word *çiftelia* is related to Alb. *çift* 'in twos, a pair.'

Circassians

An ethnic group from the Caucasus mountains. The Circassians, Alb. *çerkez,* def. *çerkezi*, were known during the Ottoman Empire for their skills as cavalrymen. In 1864, hundreds of thousands of starving Circassians fled from the Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire, when Russian forces conquered their homeland. Many of them emigrated further into the Balkans, where they settled in various regions.

Clinic

Ancient Illyrian ruler.

Çoku

Highland warrior from Kabash in Dukagjini. Son of Mar Kolë Dini.

Coku, Deda

Highland warrior.

Coku, Mashi

Highland warrior, also known as Mashi i Cokut, i.e. Mashi, son of Coku.

Coli

Highland warrior.

Committee

The Committee, Alb. *Xhemjeti*, referred to in Canto 27, was the Young Turk Committee for Progress and Unity, Turkish *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (1889-1908), meeting under Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1908.

Conference of London

The Conference of London (1912-1913) or Conference of the Ambassadors, as it is often known in Albanian history, was a meeting of the six Great Powers (Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy). It began its work on 17 December 1912 under the direction of the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey (1862-1933), following the first Balkan War and the declaration of Albanian independence in Vlora on 28 November 1912. With regard to Albania, the ambassadors had initially decided that the country would be recognized as an autonomous state under the sovereignty of the sultan. After much discussion, however, they reached a formal decision on 29 July 1913 that Albania would be a sovereign state independent of the Ottoman Empire. For the Albanians, the most tragic decision taken at this conference was the fixing of the borders where, in order to appease the exaggerated territorial claims of Albania's neighbours, the Great Powers gave the whole of Kosova, Dibra, Ohrid and Monastir to Serbia, and, in the north, gave Hoti, Gruda, much of Kelmendi territory, as well as Plava and Gucia to Montenegro.

Congress of Berlin

The Congress of Berlin was held by the Great Powers (Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia) in June and July 1878 to revise the Treaty of San Stefano, which Russia had forced upon the Ottoman Empire in that year, and to create stable political relations in the Balkans. It was chaired by Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), acting as an 'honest broker.' The Congress recognized the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, and made arrangements for a smaller, though autonomous Bulgaria, but Albanian concerns were completely ignored. The Albanian-speaking regions of Hoti, Gruda, Plava and Gucia were accorded to Montenegro, and the rest of Albanian territory was returned to the control of the Ottoman Empire. The Albanians reacted to the Congress of Berlin by the creation of the League of Prizren.

Cubaku, Vat

Highland warrior, father of Nikë Daka.

Cucaj

Montenegrin tribe and traditional tribal region, situated north of the Bay of Kotor, in the Katunska region, ~ BCS *Cuce*.

Cuja, Kolë
Highland warrior.

Cukali
Mountain peak (1721 m.) situated northeast of Shkodra in Shllaku tribal territory. Alb. *Cukal*, def. *Cukali*.

Çuku, Mirot
Highland warrior.

Culina
Name of a mountain nymph, from Alb. *culë* 'shepherd's flute.'

Cungeli, Voc
Highland warrior, slain by Kadiq Pera.

Çuni, Sadri
Highland warrior, son of Çun Selimi.

Curi, Caruk
Highland warrior.

Curri, Shaqir
Warrior from the Gjakova region.

Daci, Tomë
Highland warrior.

Daka, Gjeto
Highland warrior.

Daka, Nikë
Highland warrior, son of Vat Cubaku. Nikë Daka died at the Battle of Rrzhanica Bridge in April 1880.

Daka, Llesh Nikë
Highland warrior, betrayed by the *Jallija* of Durrës and mortally wounded.

Dake
Name of a mountain nymph, meaning no doubt the 'Dacian one.'

Daku, Pjeter Nikë
Highland warrior.

Dalina
Name of a mountain nymph, probably related to Alb. *dëllinjë*, def. *dëllinja* 'juniper.'

Dardha
Geographical area and traditional tribal region in the lower Dibra area, not far from the border with the Republic of Macedonia. There is also a settlement called Dardha in the District of Puka, recorded in 1610 as *Darda*.

Dardhamoskadele
Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'musk pear, muscadel,' from Alb. *dardhë*, def. *dardha* 'pear,' and *moskadele* 'muscadel.'

Dare Name of a mountain nymph.

Deçani Settlement in western Kosova, site of a Serb Orthodox monastery. Alb. *Deçan*, def. *Deçani*, ~ BCS *Dečani*.

Deçiq Settlement. Possibly *Dushiq*, ~ BCS *Dušić*, three kilometres southwest of Tuz in Montenegro.

Deda, Shan
Highland warrior, son of Dedë Jakupi. The Deda family of Shkodra were shopkeepers and were not considered among the leading families, but they did enjoy a certain prestige.

Deda, Vocerr
Highland warrior.

Dede, Cac
Highland warrior.

Dedi, Baca Luc
Highland warrior.

Deli, Cuba
Highland warrior

Delija, Prêlë
Highland warrior.

Delija, Shpend
Highland warrior.

Demushi, Brahokol
Highland warrior, originally from Barbullush, slain by Branko Mili.

Deralla
Leading family from Kosova, which fought the Montenegrins, Serbs and Turks.

Dervish Pasha
The historical Dervish Pasha arrived in Shkodra on 3 November 1880 with twenty-one battalions, some 10,000 soldiers, initially to defend Ulqin (Ulcinj). The expedition which Fishta describes in Canto 6 is not entirely historical, for it seems that it was conducted against the Albanians, not the Montenegrins, to force the former into accepting the resolutions of the Congress of Berlin. Ulqin was handed over to Montenegrin forces on 27 November 1880. Gjergj Fishta composed Canto 6 on 'Dervish Pasha' in 1922 while on a steamer, sailing to America. He wrote to a friend: "I finished a canto of the Highland Lute called 'Dervish Pasha' on the few good days when I was able to write on board. I believe it turned out rather interestingly. I also began another canto on the steamer, 'The Vampire' which I think will turn out

well and, from an aesthetic point of view, will be one of the best in the Highland Lute..."

Deti, Baca Lucë

Highland warrior.

Dibra

Region along the Albanian-Montenegrin border, north of Lake Ohrid. Alb. *Dibër*, def. *Dibra*, ~ BCS *Debar*.

Dike

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'desire.'

Dilke

Term for a short-barrelled, broad-mouthed rifle. Alb. *dilke*, def. *dilkeja*.

Dini, Mar Kolë

Highland warrior from Kabash in Dukagjini. Father of Çoku.

Dinosha

Settlement on the Cem River in Montenegro, ten kilometres southeast of Podgorica.

Dobërsku

Mountain and settlement to the east of Cetinje in Montenegro, ~ BCS *Dobrsko*.

Doda, Gjokë

Highland warrior from Kastrati. He died in battle in Rrashbull near Durrës on 15 August 1912.

Doda, Kaçel

Highland warrior from Zagorja in Shkreli tribal territory.

Doda, Prenk Bibë

Tribal leader and political figure. Prenk Bibë Doda (1858-1920), descendent of the Gjonmarkaj family, was born in Orosh in Mirdita and spent his youth in Istanbul. In 1876, he returned to his native Mirdita region, where he inherited the hereditary title of Captain (Kapidan) of Mirdita. Immediately after accession, he made contact with Montenegro and instigated a revolt in Mirdita, which was put down by the Turks in 1877. Doda continued to play an important role in Mirdita at the time of the League of Prizren. In 1881, he was arrested and banished to Anatolia where he remained for seventeen years. He returned to Albania in 1908 after the Young Turk Revolution. Doda had hoped to accede to the throne of Albania after independence in 1912, but nonetheless remained loyal to Prince Wilhelm zu Wied (1876-1945), under whom he served for a short time as foreign minister. After World War I, he served as deputy prime minister in the government of Turhan Pasha Përmeti.

Dodona
Ancient Greek sanctuary with an oracle of Zeus, situated in Epirus in northern Greece, not far from the Albanian border.

Doka, Marash
Highland warrior.

Done
Name of a mountain nymph.

Draga, Gjur
Montenegrin warrior.

Draga, Mihajl
Montenegrin warrior, slain by Gjeto Staka.

Dragobia
Settlement in the Valbona valley in the District of Tropoja. Alb. *Dragobi*, def. *Dragobia*.

Drangue
A semi-human figure of northern Albanian mythology. This intriguing being, standard Alb. *dragúa*, def. *dragói*, and Gheg *drangue,* stems etymologically from Latin *draco(nem)* 'dragon' or Italian *dracone* 'dragon,' and is similar to the Serbian and Bulgarian *zmaj*. *Drangues* are born wearing shirts, symbolic of the caul, and have two to four invisible wings under their armpits. The prime aim in the life of a *drangue* is to combat and slay the dragon-like *kulshedras*. When they sense a *kulshedra* approaching, *draguas* go completely berserk and their souls depart from their bodies in preparation for the coming battle. Their struggle with the *kulshedras* is reminiscent of the combat between the giants and gods of ancient Greece. When human beings are attacked by a *kulshedra*, the *drangues,* wearing felt caps, will fly to their assistance and slay the *kulshedra* by pelting it with cudgels, ploughs, yokes, lances and stones, and even with uprooted trees and houses.

Drava, Vuksa' Lekë
Montenegrin warrior, also known as Vuksa' or Vuksan Leka.

Dreni, Abdullah
Albanian leader in Gjakova. Because of the prerequisites of Albanian hospitality, Abdullah Pasha Dreni in Canto 10 cannot, under any circumstances, hand over his unwanted guest, Mehmet Ali Pasha, to the men of Gjakova. Indeed he is obliged to defend him to the death. Dúllo is a short form for Abdullah.

Drin
River in northern Albania. The Drin is the largest river in Albania and the southwestern Balkans. It is formed by the confluence of two rivers, the Black Drin, Alb. *Drini i Zi*, which takes its source at Struga in Lake Ohrid and flows 150 kilometres northwards through Dibra, and the

White Drin, Alb. *Drini i Bardhë*, which takes its source in the mountains of Kosova north of Peja and is 128 kilometres in length. The two rivers join at Kukës and flow through the mountains of northern Albania to the Adriatic Sea. Arriving at the coastal plain, part of the Drin flows into the Buna River near Shkodra and another part uses its traditional bed southwards through the Zadrima plain and flows into the Adriatic Sea near Lezha. It has a total length of 285 kilometres. The true Albanian Highlands are situated north of the Drin River.

Drogani

Mountain in Shkreli tribal territory, said to be situated between the Raba e Ducajve and Vrith.

Drume

Settlement near Bozhaj on the Montenegrin side of the Bay of Hoti (Lake Shkodra), to the west of the present border crossing at Hani i Hotit.

Dry Torrent

The Dry Torrent, Alb. *Përroi i Thatë*, is a river in the District of Malësia e Madhe, flowing from the northern Albanian mountains near Boga down into Lake Shkodra, near the town of Koplik. As the name suggests, it is dry for most of the year.

Ducaj

Settlement in Shkreli tribal territory in the District of Malësia e Madhe.

Dudi, Mark Prengë

Highland warrior.

Dudumja

Term for a two-shot Turkish rifle, Alb. *dudume, dudumja*, related to Alb. *dudum* 'Ottoman invader, Turkish lackey.'

Dukagjini

Geographical and ethnographical region of northern Albania. Dukagjini in Albania refers to the isolated mountain region east of Shkodra and north of the Drin River. It is the traditional land of the Shala and Shoshi tribes, through which the Shala and Kir Rivers flow. In Kosova, Dukagjini, or more properly Rrafshi i Dukagjinit, refers to a different region, the plain of western Kosova, stretching from Peja down to Prizren, ~ BCS *Metohija*. As a toponym, Dukagjini is said to derive from *duka* 'duke' and *Gjin* 'John,' i.e., Duke John.

Dukagjini, Lekë

cf. *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini.

Duli, Rrahman

Highland warrior.

Durmitor
Mountain region, and now national park, in northern Montenegro between the Komarnica and Tare Rivers. The highest peak is Bobotov Kuk (2,522 m.).

Durrës
Town in the District of Durrës, of which it is the administrative centre. It is known as *Durazzo* in Italian, *Dyrrhachion* in Greek, and *Drač* in Serbian. Durrës is the major port of Albania, the second largest town in the country, and one of the oldest settlements.

Dushkakuq
Unidentified settlement, probably southwest of Tuz in Montenegro.

Dushmani
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Dushmani region is situated north of the Drin River in the present District of Shkodra. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shoshi to the west, Toplana to the north, Berisha to the east, and Kabashi and Shllaku to the south. The name was recorded in the sixth century by Procopius as *Dousmanes*. The Dushmani tribe, said to be originally from the area of Tuz, south of Podgorica in Montenegro, was related to the Thaçi tribe and was reputed to be one of the wildest of the north. It had a population of about 1,400 in the late nineteenth century.

Earthly Beauty
Figure of Albanian mythology. The Earthly Beauty, Alb. *E bukura e dheut* or *E bukura e dynjas*, is one of the most popular characters of Albanian myths and fairy tales. She is the quintessence of beauty, embodying either good or evil, though more often the latter. She can do magic and is as crafty as the ancient Greek sorceress Circe. Her magic powers derive from her dress. If she wishes, she can transform human beings into pigs, but she can also play the part of a good fairy and be very helpful. In a constellation of three sisters she appears together with the Sea Beauty, Alb. *E bukura e detit,* and the Heavenly Beauty, Alb. *E bukura e qiellit.* The figure of the Earthly Beauty exists in the folklore of many other cultures: Mod. Greek *ἡ Πεντάμορφη τοῦ κόσμου* 'the Fair One of the Earth' and *ἡ Καλὴ τοῦ τόπου* 'the beauty of the land,' Italian *La Bella del mondo* 'the Beauty of the World,' Aromanian *Muşata loclui*, and in Turkish, Kurdish and Syrian, but she is especially popular in the Balkans. The name 'Earthly Beauty' is most likely a taboo term, possibly for some ancient deity of the underworld. As a goddess of the underworld and at the same time a personification of springtime, she bears some similarities to the ancient Persephone, Latin Proserpina. Proserpina was worshipped by the Romans in the Balkans under the name of Libera and, according to Georg Stadtmüller (1901-

1985), it is Libera who should be seen as the direct predecessor of the Earthly Beauty.

Elbasan

Town in the District of Elbasan, of which it is the administrative centre. Elbasan is the major settlement of central Albania, situated on the northern bank of the Shkumbin River, on the site of the ancient Roman fortification of Scampa. It was the seat of a bishop in the fifth century. Elbasan flourished in particular after the Ottoman conquest in 1466, when the thick fortress walls of the town were constructed.

Elbnishta

Mountain pastures near Mount Çakorri, lit. 'oat field.'

Erven Pasha

Turkish member of the Committee for Progress and Unity, Turkish *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, in Istanbul in 1908.

Eufrozina of Janina

Protagonist of the legend sung by the *oras* in Canto 16: 524-575 who drowns in Lake Janina rather than give herself to Ali Pasha Tepelena, ~ Greek *Kyrá Frosini*.

Evil Eye

Popular belief. Alb. *syri i keq*, Gheg *syni i keq*, also *mësysh*. As in the Middle East, it is thought in Albania that a malicious glance can do damage in itself. Accordingly, people who are believed to have such a glance, the evil eye, are avoided. One must avoid praising little children, farm animals or things of value in public so that the evil eye is not attracted to them. Anyone who does look at a child attentively may spit or wipe his eyes with his hands to save the child from harm. The attention of the evil eye can be deflected by small objects placed on or nearby the person or thing in question. A wooden spoon was often hung around the neck of an animal and a coin was stuck onto the forehead of a baby in its cradle, or a dot of rust was painted on its nose. Coins and blue glass beads could also be attached to the front locks of a child's hair.

Fani

River and region of northern central Albania. Alb. *Fan*, def. *Fani*, also *Fand*, def. *Fandi*. The Fani River flows through the Mirdita region past the towns of Rrëshen and Rubik into the Mat River. It has a length of ninety-four kilometres and is fed primarily by the Great Fani River, Alb. *Fani i Madh*, and the Lesser Fani River, Alb. *Fani i Vogël*. The Fani was referred to in 1515 as *Fanti* and in 1610 as *Fandi*.

Faslia, Can

Highland warrior. Father of Myrto.

Fatale Name of a mountain nymph, related to 'fate, fatal.'

Feri, Jakup Highland warrior from Plava. He was born in 1832 and died on 11 January 1880.

Floçka, Kshetza Figures of Albanian mythology. These nymph-like beings, fair maidens with long tresses, can be found at the edge of lakes and rivers and at the seaside, combing their hair, with which they are primarily identified. They protect the lakes and rivers from harm. The word Floçka is derived from Alb. *flokë* 'hair.' Kshetza, also *gërshetëza*, is related to the Alb. verb *gërshet* 'to braid, plait, pigtail.'

Fons Castilius Fountain in a cave on Mount Parnassus, near Delphi in Greece, sacred to Apollo and the Muses. Pilgrims drank the water there in order to be purified. The ancient Greek and Roman writers regarded it as a source of inspiration.

Franz Josef Franz Josef (1830-1916) was Emperor of Austria (r. 1848-1916) and King of Hungary (r. 1867-1916). During his rule, Austro-Hungarian influence extended well into the Balkans. Under the *Kultusprotektorat*, the Double Monarchy regarded itself as protector of the Christian populations of the Balkans, including the Catholics of Northern Albania.

Frashëri, Abdyl Bey Political leader. Abdyl Frashëri (1839-1892), like his brothers Naim Frashëri (1846-1900) and Sami Frashëri (1850-1904), was born in the southern Albanian village of Frashër. He is remembered primarily for his activities during and after the League of Prizren. On 10 June 1878, delegates from all over Albania assembled in Prizren to work out a common political platform for Albania's future. Abdyl Frashëri, representing a committee of Albanians from Istanbul, held the opening speech. After this historic meeting, Frashëri set out for southern Albania where he organized a League committee and began gathering forces to oppose the annexation of the south of the country by Greece. Although his movements were under strict surveillance by the Ottoman authorities, he managed to get back to Prizren in December 1880 and, in the following month, to set up a Provisional Government (*Kuvernë e Përdorme*), which extended its authority throughout Kosova down to Skopje. In Dibra, Abdyl Frashëri deposed the Turkish *mutasarrif* and placed the town under the administration of the League, but at the end of April 1881, the Sublime Porte sent troops to quell the uprising.

Following resistance in Gjakova and the suppression of the League, Abdyl Frashëri was obliged to flee westwards towards the Adriatic where he hoped to escape to Italy. He was captured by Ottoman forces near Elbasan and was sentenced to life in prison. At the end of 1885, Abdyl bey Frashëri was pardoned at the intercession of Gazi Osman Pasha after four years in a Turkish jail. He died in Istanbul following a long illness. Fishta's poetic rendition of the 119-line speech by Abdyl Frashëri in Canto 9: 250-369 was published in 1920 in a brochure entitled *Epopeja e fisit Shqptar* (Epic of the Albanian People) at the request of Mihajl Turtulli, member of the Albanian High Council of State, and the poet received a payment of 1,000 francs.

Galani, Dash

Highland warrior.

Gale

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'black sheep.'

Gashi

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Gashi region is situated in the District of Tropoja, from east of the town of Bajram Curri into Kosova. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Krasniqi to the west, and Bytyçi to the south. The Gashis, whose name was recorded in 1634 as *Gaasi*, were a Muslim tribe and were the traditional enemies of the Catholic Shalas. Gashi is a common family name, in particular in Kosova.

Gavrani, Llazo

Montenegrin warrior, also called Colonel Gavro.

Gavro, Colonel

Montenegrin warrior, also *Serdar Gavro*. Synonym for Llazo Gavrani.

Gega, Gjeto

Highland warrior from Shllaku.

Gegëhyseni

Settlement in Krasniqi tribal territory in the District of Tropoja. Alb. *Gegëhysen*, def. *Gegëhyseni*, now known as *Lekurtaj* or *Selimaj*.

Genthius

Last Illyrian king of Shkodra. Son of Pleuratus, Genthius was vanquished by the Romans in 168 B.C., a date which marked the conclusion of the three Illyrian Wars with Rome. Many of today's Albanian men bear the name Gent in his honour.

Gera, Mark Nikollë

Highlander from Kalivaçi, born in the Munella region of the bayrak of Spaçi. He was the *kumara* of Bec Patani.

Gere

Name of a mountain nymph, from Alb. *ger* 'squirrel.'

Gërrzhiqi, Pipo
Montenegrin warrior. The BCS form of the name would be *Pipo Gržići*.

Gheg
The term Gheg, also Geg, Alb. *geg*, refers to the northern Albanians, i.e., all Albanians living north of the Shkumbin River and speaking Gheg dialects. The territory of the Ghegs is poetically referred to as Ghegnia or Gegnia (pronounced with a hard *g*). The southern Albanians are called Tosks.

Ghegnia
Northern Albania, land of the Ghegs, also standard Albanian *Gegëria*, as opposed to *Toskëria*, southern Albania.

George Castriota
cf. Castriota, George

Gila, Kerrni
Highland warrior from Zagorja in Shkreli territory. He was under the command of Oso Kuka.

Gila, Nel
Highland warrior from Vuthaj.

Gile
Name of a mountain nymph.

Gimaj
Settlement in Shala tribal territory in the northern part of the District of Shkodra.

Gjakova
The town of Gjakova, ~ BCS *Djakovica*, Turkish *Yakova*, is situated in western Kosova between Prizren and Peja. It is a settlement of strong Muslim tradition, with a present population of about 80,000, almost entirely Albanian. Gjakova was first mentioned in 1574 and served as a trading centre on the route between Shkodra and Istanbul. It was traditionally a town of handicraftsmen and merchants, and possessed one of the most beautiful oriental bazaars in the Balkans. Alas, on 30 March 1999, Serb forces razed the whole centre of Gjakova to the ground, leaving the old bazaar in ashes. Only the Hadum Mosque, dating from 1592-1593, survived, in part at least, because the heavy front door withstood the Serb assault. Much of the old town has since been rebuilt in its traditional style.

Gjani
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The zone of the small Gjani tribe, also Gjâji or Xhani, is situated in the upper Kir valley in the Dukagjini area, east of Shkodra, near the lands of the Kiri, Suma and Plani tribes.

Gjeçi, Preng Nkollë
Highland warrior.

Gjeka, Marash
Highland warrior.

Gjeka, Mark
Highland warrior.

Gjeli, Losh
Highland warrior.

Gjeli, Tahir
Highland warrior.

Gjeli, Vuksan
Highland warrior from Zagorja under the command of Oso Kuka.

Gjeloshi, Lucë
Highland warrior from Gruda.

Gjeloshi, Nikë
cf. Luli, Nikë Gjelosh.

Gjeloshi, Pllum
Highland warrior.

Gjeloshi, Ujkë
Highland warrior.

Gjenoviq
Settlement in Hoti territory.

Gjera, Ujk
Highland warrior.

Gjergj Elez Alia
cf. Alia, Gjergj Elez.

Gjoka, Gjelosh
Highland warrior.

Gjoka, Mati
Highland warrior.

Gjoka, Palokë
Highland warrior of the Hoti tribe.

Gjoka, Uc
Highland warrior of the Hoti tribe.

Gjoni, Balë
Highland warrior.

Gjoni, Llesh
Highland warrior of the Gjonmarkaj tribe in Mirdita. He is also known as Black Lleshi, or Black Alexander, Alb. *Lleshi i Zi.*

Gjoni, Nika
Highland physician from Kastrati.

Gjoni, Ndoc
Alternative name of Ndoc Gjo' Goci.

Gjonmarkaj
The leading tribe of the Mirdita region. Also *Gjomarkaj*.

Gjugji, Tomë
Highland warrior.

Gjuka, Zeliq
Montenegrin warrior from Vranina who was under the command of Oso Kuka, but who betrayed the latter to the Montenegrins.

Gjura, Jeliq
Montenegrin warrior.

Gjurakoci
Village in western Kosova, south of Istog. Alb. *Gjurakoc*, def. *Gjurakoci*, ~ BCS *Djurakovac*.

Gjuro
Name for a Montenegrin warrior.

Goci, Ndoc Gjo'
Highland warrior, alternatively known as Ndoc Gjoni.

Gojani
Settlement in the District of Puka, between Fushë Arrëz and Gjegjan. It was known for its pots and pans. Alb. *Gojan*, def. *Gojani*.

Golemi, Mois
Mois or Moses Golemi was a landowner and one of the commanders of Scanderbeg's forces fighting the Turks in the fifteenth century. He is commemorated in Albanian folk verse. Fishta also devoted a poem to him.

Golija, Ton
Highland warrior from Gjakova.

Goshi, Gjokë Dodë
Highland warrior.

Gospodari
BCS *gospodar* 'ruler, lord,' referring here to Prince Nikolla.

Grace
Name of a mountain nymph, related to Alb. *gracë*, def. *graca*, 'decorative lace.'

Gradina
Small river near Plava in southeastern Montenegro. The Gradina is a tributary of the Komarusha.

Gramoleci
Settlement between Gjakova and Deçan in western Kosova, now known as Gramaçel.

Grapevine Pass

The Grapevine Pass, Alb. *Qafë Hardhi*, def. *Qafa e Hardhisë*, is a figment of the poet's imagination. The real toponym *Qafë Hardhi* is not a pass, but a small hillside on the outskirts of Shkodra, where grapes were once grown. It is now situated between the train station and the cemetery.

Grishi, Lano

Highland warrior.

Grizhi, Maça

Highland warrior.

Groshe

Name of a mountain nymph, related to Alb. *groshë*, def. *grosha,* 'white beans.'

Gruda

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Gruda region is now situated in Montenegro in the mountains along the Albanian border, east of Podgorica. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Hoti and Kelmendi to the south and east, and on Slavic tribal regions to the north. The name was recorded in 1648 as *Grudi* and is related to Alb. *grudë* 'soil, sod,' a word derived from Slav. *gruda*. Gruda was a primarily Catholic tribe and, according to Baron Franz Nopcsa, had a population of some 7,000 in 1907.

Gucia

Small town situated in the mountains of southeastern Montenegro, eleven kilometres from the larger Plava. Gucia, now inhabited by a majority of BCS-speaking Muslims and a minority of Albanians, prospered in the nineteenth century when it was larger than nearby Plava. Alb. *Guci*, def. *Gucia*, ~ BCS *Gusinje*.

Gucia, Ali Pasha

cf. Ali Pasha of Gucia.

Gurakuqi, Luigj

Warrior, writer and political figure of the Rilindja movement. Luigj Gurakuqi (1879-1925) studied at the Saverian College run by the Jesuits in his native Shkodra. In 1897, he left for Italy to study at the Italo-Albanian college of San Demetrio Corone under Girolamo De Rada (1814-1903), who was to exercise a strong influence on him. In 1908, after the revolution of the Young Turks, Gurakuqi returned to Albania and soon became a prominent figure in the nationalist movement, which led to the country's independence in 1912. Together with Gjergj Fishta, he represented the *Bashkimi* (Unity) Literary Society of Shkodra at the Congress of Monastir in 1908. When Albania's first teacher-training college, the Normal School (*Shkolla Normale*), was set up in Elbasan

on 1 December 1909, it was Luigj Gurakuqi who was appointed its director. Gurakuqi was also one of the leaders of the northern Albanian uprising around Shkodra in 1911. He took part in the uprising in southern Albania in 1912, and in March of that year travelled to Skopje and Gjakova to stir up support for open resistance to Turkish rule and for the inclusion of Kosova in a new Albanian state. Gurakuqi was involved in the declaration of Albanian independence in Vlora on 28 November 1912 and served as minister of education in the first Albanian government, headed by Ismail Qemal bey Vlora (1844-1919). In 1915, when his native Shkodra was occupied by Montenegrin troops, Gurakuqi was taken prisoner and jailed in Montenegro until after the invasion of Austro-Hungarian forces. During the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Shkodra, he served as director-general of education and assisted in establishing about 200 elementary schools. In 1918, Gurakuqi was again appointed minister of education in the newly formed Durrës government. In 1921, he was appointed minister of the interior in the government of Hasan bey Prishtina (1873-1933), and, in 1924, was minister of finance in the short-lived government of Fan Noli (1882-1965). With the overthrow of Fan Noli's democratic administration, he was forced to flee to Italy and was murdered in Bari by one Baltjon Stambolla, no doubt an agent of Ahmet Zogu (1895-1961). On 29 May 1991, the town of Shkodra named the newly founded university there after this great figure.

Guri i Lekës

A cliff, lit. 'the rock of Leka,' near Pepsumaj, overlooking the Lesniqe River in Shoshi territory of the District of Shkodra, in the northern Albanian mountains.

Haberi, Shtjef'

Highland warrior.

Hadji

Honorific title in Islam. A *hadji*, also Engl. *hajji*, is a Muslim who has made a *hadj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca, ~ Alb. *haxhi*, def. *haxhiu*, from Turkish *haci*.

Hajmel

Settlement in the Zadrima region of the District of Shkodra, situated twenty-five kilometres southeast of Shkodra. Alb. *Hajmel*, def. *Hajmeli*. It was known in the Middle Ages as *Aimelli*.

Haka, Gjekë Marash

Highland warrior.

Haka, Halil

Highland warrior of the Hoti tribe.

Haliti, Adush
Highland warrior.

Hane
A game played outdoors with stones by two, four or more players.

Haramia
Mountain (2,196 m.) near Gucia in southeastern Montenegro, in the vicinity of Mount Greben.

Harap
Figure of Albanian mythology. The term, standard Alb. *arap*, def. *arapi,* and Gheg *harap* 'Moor,' is derived from the word 'Arab.' The *harap* is a figure also to be encountered in Turkey and in the other Balkan countries, ~ Romanian *arap, harap*. He is black or dark-skinned and is usually evil, though he is also capable of doing good.

Harapi, Zef
Patriot and warrior. Zef Simon Harapi (1885-1912) from Shkodra studied at the Saverian College of Shkodra, and in Austria. He died in battle in Rrashbull near Durrës on 15 August 1912.

Has
Geographical and traditional tribal region. Has refers to the Highland area along the Albania-Kosova border from Qafa e Prushit near Gjakova in the north to the White Drin River in the south. In Albania, there is now a District of Has, situated north of the District of Kukës and south of the District of Tropoja. As an ethnographical region, Has, or Hasi, can be divided into two subregions: Soft Has, Alb. *Hasi i Butë*, which is primarily in Kosova, and Dry Has, Alb. *Hasi i Thatë*, mostly within Albania.

Hasani, Rrushman
Highland warrior, also known as Rrush Hasani.

Hasani, Smajl
Highland warrior from Hoti, father of Alush Smajli.

Hasi, Muç
Highland warrior, also known as Muça Hasi.

Haxhí, Hasan
Highland warrior from Nokshiq.

Haxhija, Beqir
Highland warrior from Gucia.

Haxhija, Omer
Highland warrior and voyvode of Nokshiq.

Haxhija, Osman
Highland warrior, voyvode of the tribe of Nokshiq.

Helicon
Mountain range in Greece, sacred to the Muses.

Heqimi, Ndrekë
Highland warrior from Shkodra who served as the sultan's bodyguard. His family, *Muzhani*, had been given the nickname *Heqimi* 'the doctor.'

Herzegovina
Part of southern Bosnia and Herzegovina bordering on Montenegro.

Hila
Ancient Illyrian ruler.

Hisa, Avdi
Albanian shepherd near Vranina.

Hodja
Title of respect in Muslim society. Alb. *hoxhë*, def. *hoxha,* from Turkish *hoca.*

Hodo Begu
Warrior of a leading Shkodra family, originally from Dervishej. Hodo Begu Dervishi (1836-1883), also known as Hodo Bey or Hodo Pasha Sokoli, was commander of the Turkish border guards on Lake Shkodra in about 1860, under Abdi Pasha Çerkezi, and was decorated in 1868. He later served as a colonel commanding the military gendarmerie in Shkodra. Hodo Bey played a prominent military role at the time of the League of Prizren, in particular in April 1880 when he headed a committee to oppose the secession of Hoti, Gruda, Plava and Gucia, as demanded by the Congress of Berlin. In this capacity, he led a force of 8,000 Shkodra volunteers and Highlanders to Tuz to defend the border region, and exchanged his Turkish military uniform for native dress, a gesture which made him famous at the time. He was arrested by Dervish Pasha in December 1880 and was interned in Istanbul and Erzincan, where he was executed.

Hodo Pasha
cf. Hodo Begu.

Holy Mountain
Mountain range, Alb. *Mali i Shenjtit*, in the Orosh region of the District of Mirdita, the highest peak of which is *Maja e Zezë* (Black Peak) at 1,583 m.

Hoti
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Hoti region is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe along the road from the Albanian-Montenegrin border-crossing Han i Hotit ('The Inn of Hoti') and Bajza, up the valley to the northeast to Rapsh-Starja, leading towards Vermosh. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Gruda to the north, Kelmendi to the northeast, and Kastrati to the south. The name Hoti was recorded in 1330. In 1474, the region was mentioned as *montanee octorum, montanea ottanorum* (Mountain of the Hotis). The

Hoti tribe, traditionally Catholic, had a population of about 4,000 in 1842. The Hotis were well respected among the other tribes and had the right to march first into battle. The Great Powers decided that the lands of Hoti and Gruda were to be handed over to Montenegro on 22 April 1880. Ottoman forces withdrew from the region on 22 April, but advancing Montenegrin troops were met with fierce resistance from the Albanian forces of the League of Prizren, in particular at the Bridge of Rrzhanica, as commemorated in Canto 14.

Hoti i Kujit

Mountain settlement, also Hoti i Kûj't, south of Plava in southeastern Montenegro.

Huta

A rear-loading, single-shot flintlock weapon with four rifling grooves. The *huta,* produced between 1875 and 1910, was an Albanian version of the Martini rifle. It was first used at the time of the League of Prizren, 1878-1881. Alb. *hutë*, def. *huta*. In Canto 20: 65, Fishta also refers to an 'English *huta*,' Alb. *hutë t' Inglizit*.

Iballja

Region and river in the District of Puka. Alb. *Iballe*, def. *Iballja*. It was recorded in 1571 as *Ikbale.*

Ileri

Turkish word meaning 'forwards!'

Illia, Nesho

Montenegrin warrior.

Imam

Term for a prayer-leader in Islam.

Ikiq, Bozho

Montenegrin warrior, father of Mihail Ikiq.

Ikiq, Mihail

Montenegrin warrior, son of Bozho Ikiq.

Ilija, Gjoko

Montenegrin warrior from Nikshiq, slain by Lucë Gjeloshi.

Illia, Tverdko

Montenegrin warrior. The BCS form of the name would be Tvrdko Ilija.

Illyria

Term used in Roman times to describe Albania and the eastern coast of the Adriatic. The Illyrians are thus the ancient inhabitants of the western Balkans, a collection of tribes who have not been entirely identified by archaeologists. They spoke an Indo-European language, of which few remains have survived - mostly personal and place names. Their territory stretched from the northern Adriatic down to Albania, the three main districts being Dalmatia, Iapydia and Liburnia. An Illyrian

kingdom was created ca. 383 B.C. and survived, despite internal dissension and a growing conflict with Macedon and Rome, until it was conquered and subjugated by the Romans in about 168 B.C. Many Albanians claim their ethnic origins from the ancient Illyrians.

Iron Peak
Mountain, Alb. *Maja e Hekurave* (2,560 m.). It is situated to the southwest of the valley of the Valbona in the District of Tropoja and forms part of the Gjakova Mountain Range.

Isniqi
Settlement north of Deçan in western Kosova. Alb. *Isniq*, def. *Isniqi*, ~ BCS *Istinić*. The reference in Canto 17: 413 is not to Isniq itself, but to the *Bjeshkët e Isniqit* 'pastures of Isniq,' the high mountain pastures behind Plava on the Montenegrin side of the border, which belonged to the herdsmen of Isniq.

Isufi, Zhukë
Highland warrior.

Ivani, Dedë
Highland warrior from Razna.

Ivani, Vatë
Highland warrior.

Jakova, Tuke
Goldsmith. Gold and silversmiths from Kosova, in particular from Prizren and Gjakova, once enjoyed great repute in Shkodra for their filigree work. Tuke Jakova is said to have been one of the best.

Jakupi, Dedë
Highland warrior from Shkodra. Father of Shan Dede.

Jallija
Turkish term (*yalı*) meaning 'coastal plain, shore, beach.' It refers in the passage beginning in Canto 18: 441 to an Albanian political grouping which aimed to drive the Turks out of Durrës. The Highlanders were counting on the support of the *Jallija*, but the latter changed sides and allied itself with the Turks.

Jana, Basho
Highland warrior from Merturi. Uncle of Prêlë Tuli.

Janina
Capital of Epirus, now in northwestern Greece. Janina, Greek *Iôannina*, was the home of Ali Pasha Tepelena in the early nineteenth century and was then considered the 'capital of Albania.'

Janissary
Infantryman in the Ottoman army, originally a member of the sultan's personal guard. Alb. *jeniçer*, def. *jeniçeri*, from Turkish *yeniçeri*.

Janja

Name for a Slavic woman, a Montenegrin mother, or the wife of a Montenegrin warrior.

Janku

Montenegrin warrior.

Jegumiri

A small settlement, also known as *Jugomir,* def. *Jugomiri,* in Kastrati tribal territory near Rapsha in the northern Albanian mountains.

Jere

Name of a mountain nymph.

John, Father

Franciscan friar or priest of the Kelmendi tribe, Alb. *Pater Gjoni,* no doubt a personification of the author.

Jovan

First name of a Montenegrin fighter. Also *Jovani.*

Jovani, Nesh

Montenegrin warrior.

Jubleta

Heavy black, woollen, sleeveless smock which bells out at the bottom. The *jubleta* was formerly worn by women in many regions of the northern Albanian mountains, and is still worn on ceremonial occasions. Alb. *xhubletë*, def. *xhubleta.*

Jukiqi, Savo

Montenegrin warrior. Nephew of Bozhiq.

Jure, Matiq

Montenegrin warrior, commander from Kolashin.

Kabash

Settlement in the District of Puka. Alb. *Kabash,* def. *Kabashi.*

Kabashi, Ukë

Highland warrior from the highlands of Peja. Father of Rrustem Uka.

Kaçeli, Cac

Highland warrior.

Kaçeli, Kot

Highland warrior.

Kaculi, Mal

Highland warrior.

Kadrija, Llano

Highland warrior and chief from Dragobia in the District of Tropoja.

Kajmekam

Term for a governor or prefect of a town in the Ottoman Empire.

Kakarriqi
Settlement, swampy region and mountain range in the District of Lezha. It is situated on the old main road between Shkodra and Lezha. Alb. *Kakarriq*, def. *Kakarriqi*. The term was first recorded in a Venetian registry in 1416 as *Chacharichi*.

Kalivaçi
Settlement in the District of Lezha situated on the upper reaches of the Gjadër River valley. Alb. *Kalivaç*, def. *Kalivaçi*.

Kallmet
Settlement in the District of Lezha, situated ten kilometres north of the town of Lezha. It was recorded in 1621 as *Calametti*.

Kalturku
Unidentified locality, possibly in the vicinity of Tuz in Montenegro.

Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini.
System of customary law. The *Kanun* or Code of Lekë Dukagjini, Alb. *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*, is the most famous compilation of Albanian customary or consuetudinal law. This initially unwritten legal code governed social behaviour and almost every facet of life in the isolated and otherwise lawless terrain of the northern Highlands, and was adhered to throughout much of northern Albania for centuries. Indeed, it is widely observed even today. The heartland of the *Kanun* was Dukagjini, the Highlands of Lezha, Mirdita, Shala, Shosh, Nikaj-Merturi and the Plain of Dukagjini in present-day western Kosova. Lekë Dukagjini (1410-1481), after whom the code was named, is a little-known and somewhat mysterious figure. He was a fifteenth-century noble and a bitter rival of Scanderbeg. Whether he compiled the code or simply gave it his name is not known. The *Kanun* was strictly observed by the tribes of northern Albania and had priority over any other laws, ecclesiastical or secular, which tried to impose themselves in the mountains. With the help of this ancient code, the Highland tribes were able to preserve their identity, their autonomy and their way of life, although they were ostensibly part of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries.

Kapica
BCS term for the flat cap or headpiece of Montenegrin national dress.

Kapuka, Lul
Highland warrior.

Kastrati
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Kastrati region is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe, east and northeast of Bajza. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Hoti to the north, Kelmendi to the northeast, and the Koplik region to the south. The

name was recorded as *Kastrati* in 1416 and *Castrati* in 1635, and is thought to be related to Lat. *castrum* 'Roman camp.' The Kastrati tribe had a population of about 2,000 in the late nineteenth century.

Kazazi, Rem

Highland warrior from Gegëhyseni in Krasniqi tribal territory in the District of Tropoja.

Keçota, Bub

Highland warrior from Pelaj. Father of Dedel Bubi.

Kelmendi

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Kelmendi region is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe in the most northerly and isolated portion of Albania. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Gruda to the west, Hoti to the southwest, Boga to the south, and Shala to the east. The administrative centre of this isolated mountain region is now Vermosh. The name 'Kelmendi,' recorded in 1485 as *Kelmente* and in 1689 as *Clementi*, is related to the Latin personal name *Clementus,* borrowed into Albanian through the influence of the Catholic Church. In the mid-1580s, the Catholic Kelmendi tribesmen ceased paying tribute to the Ottoman state and, as fierce and independent-minded warriors, they gradually came to dominate all of northern Albania. They were exceptionally mobile and went raiding and marauding not only throughout the northern mountains, but deep into the territories of Kosova, Bosnia and Serbia, and indeed as far as Plovdiv in Bulgaria. The Kelmendi played a prominent role in various anti-Ottoman rebellions, especially in the first half of the seventeenth century. They allied themselves with the Hapsburg forces invading Kosova in 1689, and after the withdrawal of the Imperial Army in 1690, were surrounded by Ottoman troops and compelled to leave their mountain homeland and settle in the Peshteri (Pešter) region of the Sandjak in 1702. During the Austrian campaign of 1730, they were then obliged to retreat with the Hapsburg army to Austrian-controlled territory near Belgrade, where many of them settled. Though they remained a powerful tribe in northern Albania over the following 150 years, they never regained the power they had enjoyed in the seventeenth century. In the late nineteenth century, the Kelmendi tribe had a modest population of some 4,000.

Keqi, Galo

Highland warrior.

Keqi, Maça

Highland warrior.

Keqi, Prelot

Highland warrior.

Keqi, Voc
Highland warrior.

Keqota, Ulë
Highland figure. Father of Tringa and Curr Ula.

Keri, Prêlë
Highland warrior.

Kernica
Little settlement on the western bank of Lake Shkodra in Montenegro, about eight kilometres south of Virpazar. There was a historical battle at Kernica between Albanian and Montenegrin forces on 17 January 1862, ~ BCS *Krnjice*.

Kërrstiq, Vuk
Montenegrin warrior slain by Gjeto Gega. The BCS form of the name would be Vuk Krstić.

Kiri, Lul Pal
Highland warrior.

Kodhel
Settlement in the District of Lezha. It was recorded by Giezzi Biancho in 1621 as *Codeli*. Alb. *Kodhel*, def. *Kodheli*.

Kokoti, Gjur
Montenegrin warrior shot by Tringa.

Kola, Gjelosh
Highland warrior from the Dukagjini region.

Kola, Marka
Highland warrior from Shoshi.

Kola, Preng Mar'
cf. Markola, Preng.

Kolashin
Town in the mountains of central Montenegro, ~ BCS *Kolašin*.

Komarusha
Settlement and river near Meteja, northeast of Plava in southeastern Montenegro. Also Alb. *Kumarusha*, ~ BCS *Komaraca*.

Korenica, Hoxha
One of the rebel leaders of Gjakova.

Koplik
Village in the District of Malësia e Madhe, situated on the road between Shkodra and the Montenegrin border at Hani i Hotit. It was recorded in about 1200 as *Cupelnich*. Alb. *Koplik*, def. *Kopliku*.

Koprivniku
Mountain range in Kosova, near the Montenegrin and Albanian borders. The highest peak of this range is Mount Veternik (2,461 m.). Alb. *Koprivnik*, def. *Koprivniku*.

Kosova

Balkan country or territory bordering Albania and Montenegro to the west, Serbia to the north and east, and the Republic of Macedonia to the south. Kosova, also Kosovo, was part of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth century to 1912, when it was conquered by the Serb army. Despite its majority Albanian population, it remained under Serb rule until the Kosova War of 1999, and is currently a United Nations protectorate.

Kotor

Town in the Bay of Kotor on the northern Montenegrin coast, ~ Italian *Cattaro*.

Krrabi

Mountain range and region situated south of the Drin and north of Puka and Fushë Arrëz, in the present District of Puka. Alb. *Krrab*, def. *Krrabi*.

Krasniqi

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Krasniqi region is situated in the District of Tropoja north of the Drin River, from Fierza eastwards to the District of Has, and northwards to the Montenegrin border, including most of the upper Valbona valley. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Nikaj and Merturi to the west, Bugjoni to the south, Bytyçi to the east, and Gashi to the northeast. The name, of Slavic origin, was recorded in 1634 as *Crastenigeia*. The Krasniqi tribe was primarily Muslim.

Krevenica

Settlement in the District of Malësia e Madhe, in Hoti tribal territory.

Krista

Montenegrin warrior.

Kruja

Town and mountainside fortress, situated north of Tirana. Currently the administrative headquarters of the District of Kruja, it was first referred to as *Kroai* in a Byzantine document in the early seventh century. In mediaeval Latin, it was called *Croya* or *oppidum Croarum*. Kruja formed the heart of the kingdom of Arbanon in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and of the Angevin realm, which was set up thereafter. In 1343, it was conquered by the Serbs and later ruled by the Balsha and Thopia families. Historically, Kruja is associated primarily with Scanderbeg, who seized the fortress in 1443 and withstood three Ottoman sieges there. After Scanderbeg's death in 1468, Kruja fell to the Venetians and then to the Turks in 1478. It is a centre of the Bektashi order of dervishes. The word Kruja is related to Alb. *kroi* 'fountain, spring.' In Italian, it was known as *Croia*, and in Turkish as

Akçahisar, Akhisar 'the white fortress,' from Turkish *akça, ak* 'white' and *hisar* 'castle, fortress.'

Kryebushati

There is a settlement called Bushat, about twenty kilometres south of Shkodra, Alb. *Bushat*, def. *Bushati*. Kryebushati, from Alb. *krye* 'head, main' and *Bushati*, would seem to refer to 'main or central Bushati.'

Kthella

Settlement in the District of Mirdita. The toponym was recorded in 1610 by Marino Bizzi as *Chtella*. Alb. *Kthellë*, def. *Kthella*.

Kuka, Oso

Oso Kuka (1812-1862) serves as the protagonist in the first five cantos of the Highland Lute. The historical Oso Kuka was born in Shkodra in 1812, as the son of Bejtullah Kuka, bayraktar of Veziri. He spent twenty-seven years away from his homeland in the service of the Ottoman army, in Anatolia, Tripoli and Aleppo, before returning to Albania as a captain. In 1859, he served as commander of the border guards under Abdi Pasha Çerkezi. Oso Kuka is associated with the battle of Vranina which is described in detail in the early cantos of the Highland Lute. He died in battle in June 1862. Even today, he is remembered in Vranina. The Montenegrin, i.e. Slav-speaking villagers there will show visitors the so-called 'house of Oso Kuka.' Oso is the short form of Osman.

Kukli, Gjokë

Highland warrior.

Kuku majko

BCS expression meaning 'woe, mother!'

Kuku meni

BCS expression meaning 'woe is me!'

Kuli, Marka

Highland warrior from Kthella in Mirdita.

Kulla

Term for a fortified stone tower. The stone *kulla* was a multi-storeyed dwelling designed to house and defend an extended family. The word derives originally from Persian *qulla* 'mountain summit, top.' Alb. *kullë*, def. *kulla*.

Kulshedra

Figure of Albanian mythology. This female dragon, Alb. *kulshedër*, def. *kulshedra*, also Alb. *kuçedër*, def. *kuçedra*, derives from Latin *chersydrus* and Greek *khersydros* 'amphibious snake.' The *kulshedra*, usually described as a huge serpent with seven to twelve heads, is one of the most popular figures of Albanian mythology, being well known

throughout the Albanian-speaking Balkans and among the Italo-Albanians of southern Italy.

Kumara

Term for a godparent, the witness at a wedding, or the person who holds a baby at baptism or gives it its first haircut. Standard Alb. *kumbar*, def. *kumbara*.

Kuqishta

Settlement at the foot of Mount Çakorri in the Rugova Highlands of western Kosova, in the direction of Nokshiq. There is also an unrelated village of Kuqishta in the Municipality of Skenderaj in central Kosova.

Kurbini

Mountain region east of the town of Laç in the present District of Kurbin. The word is recorded in Italian as *Corbino*, *Curbino* and is said to be derived from Latin *Corvinus*. Alb. *Kurbin*, def. *Kurbini*.

Kurti, Kolë

Highland warrior.

Kushja

Settlement in the District of Malësia e Madhe, in Hoti tribal territory. Alb. *Kushe*, def. *Kushja*, also *Kusha*. There is a nearby field called *Kushja e Hotit*.

Lac

Term for a people or ethnic group in the Ottoman Empire. The reference is obscure. It does not seem to refer to the Caucasian Laks. Fishta uses the personal name Lacë Manova to refer to an Ottoman recruit of oriental origin.

Lahuta

A bowed, single-stringed musical instrument with an egg-shaped body and a long neck. Similar to the BCS *gusle*, it was the standard instrument used in northern Albania for the singing of epic verse. Etymologically, Alb. *lahutë*, def. *lahuta*, is related to the term 'lute.'

Lali

Name of a mountain nymph.

Lani, Dokë

Highland warrior.

League of Prizren

On 10 June 1878, delegates from all over Albania assembled at Prizren to work out a common political platform to counter the Treaty of San Stefano and the resolutions of the Congress of Berlin, which had ignored the Albanian wish for self-determination. The League no doubt initially had the tacit support of the Ottoman government. Among the most prominent participants at the League of Prizren were Abdyl bey Frashëri, Sulejman Vokshi (1815-1890) and Ymer Prizreni (1820-

1887). On 13 June 1878, the League submitted an eighteen-page memorandum to Benjamin Disraeli, the British representative at the Congress of Berlin, announcing: "Just as we are not and do not want to be Turks, so we shall oppose with all our might anyone who would like to turn us into Slavs or Austrians or Greeks. We want to be Albanians." The *Kararname*, resolutions of the League of Prizren, were passed and signed by forty-seven Albanian beys on 18 June 1878. They included: a refusal to give up any territory to Serbia, Montenegro or Greece; a demand for the return of all Albanian-speaking land annexed by Serbia and Montenegro; Albanian autonomy within the Empire; and no more conscription for, and taxation by, the central government in Constantinople. After this historic meeting, which served to promote the national awakening, the Ottoman authorities dispatched troops to quell the uprising, and the League of Prizren was suppressed at the end of April 1881. The League of Prizren is considered the beginning of the long struggle against the Ottoman Empire and against Albania's neighbours for the country's self-determination and independence. The original venue of the League of Prizren is commemorated by a small museum, which has now been rebuilt, after being razed to the ground by Serb forces during the Kosova War on 27 March 1999.

Leci, Kolë Gjo'

Highland warrior.

Leci, Ndrecë

Highland warrior.

Leka

Leka is used by Fishta as a term for a Highland warrior, envisioned as the heroic descendant of Lekë Dukagjini. As the shortened, Albanian form for Alexander, Leka can also refer to Alexander the Great of Macedonia, who in Albanian legendry is regarded as an ancestor of the Albanians. Alb. *Lekë*, def. *Leka*.

Leka, Mican

Highland warrior from the Dardha region. The death of Mican Leka and the testament he conveys to his mother occur in Albanian folk songs.

Leka, Vuksan

Montenegrin warrior, also known as Vuksa' Lekë Drava.

Lere

Name of a mountain nymph, from Alb. *lerë*, def. *lera,* 'scree, mountain creek bed full of rocks.'

Lesendra

Islet near Vranina, now surmounted by the ruins of a fortress and situated on the north side of the present causeway leading across Lake Shkodra from Podgorica to the Adriatic coast.

Lezha

Town in northern Albania, situated near the mouth of the Drin River, between Tirana and Shkodra. As a settlement, Lezha with its fortified acropolis dates back at least to the eighth century B.C. In 385 B.C., Dionysios I, the tyrant of Syracuse, is said to have founded a Greek colony here, called Lissos. In 168 B.C., it was settled by the Romans under Julius Caesar and received the status of a *municipium*. Between the third and fifth centuries A.D., it was the seat of a bishop. In 1343, Lezha was conquered by the Serbs and in 1393, by the Venetians. Like Kruja, Lezha is primarily associated with the figure of Scanderbeg who convened an assembly of Albanian nobles here on 2 March 1444 to counter an impending Ottoman invasion. Scanderbeg died in Lezha in 1468 and was buried in the church of St. Nicholas, where his grave can be seen. In 1979, the town was destroyed by an earthquake and is still subject to flooding every year from the Drin River. The name of the town was recorded in ancient Greek as *Lissos* and in Latin as *Lissus*. Alb. *Lezhë*, def. *Lezha*, ~ Italian *Alessio*.

Lice

Name of a mountain nymph.

Like

Name of a mountain nymph.

Lim

River in eastern Montenegro. The Lim flows northwards from Lake Plava into southern Serbia and Bosnia, where it merges with the Drina River.

Lissus

Poetic term for the town of Lezha, from Latin *Lissus*.

Ljubotini

Settlement and traditional Montenegrin tribal region, situated to the southwest of Rijeka Crnojeviča. The term was recorded in 1614 as *Gliubottin*, ~ BCS *Ljubotinj*.

Llap

The term Llap, Alb. *Llap*, def. *Llapi*, refers to the Albanian-speaking inhabitants of northeastern Kosova, the region known as the Llap valley, which extends from the Kopaonik Mountain Range in the west to the Serb border in the east. i.e., basically the area in and around Podujeva, now also called Besiana. It is also known as Little Kosova, Alb. *Kosova e Vogël*.

Llazar

Name for a Montenegrin warrior.

Lluko

Montenegrin warrior from Cetinje.

Lore Name of a mountain nymph.

Loshe Name of a mountain nymph.

Loshi, Nisho
Highland warrior.

Luboteni
Mount Luboteni (2,499 m.) is one of the highest peaks in the Sharri Mountain Range, which forms the current border between Kosova and the Republic of Macedonia. Alb. *Luboten*, def. *Luboteni*, ~ BCS *Ljuboten*.

Luca, Mirash
Highland warrior.

Lula, Mar
Highland warrior and leader of the fighters from Shala.

Luli, Dedë Gjo'
Highland warrior. Though not a bayraktar himself, Dedë Gjo' Luli (1840-1915) was from a respected family of Traboina in Hoti tribal territory. He has gone into Albanian history as one of the most distinguished of the Highland warriors. Dedë Gjo' Luli took part in the defence of Plava and Gucia in 1879-1880 and is remembered in particular for having led the armed insurrection of Hoti, Gruda and Kelmendi in 1911. He was slain near Orosh on 24 September 1915.

Luli, Gjokë Dedë
Highland warrior.

Luli, Llesh Nkollë
Highland warrior from Traboina in Hoti tribal territory.

Luli, Nikë Gjelosh
Highland warrior, also known as Nikë Gjeloshi.

Luma
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Luma region is situated in the District of Kukës south of the White Drin River and east of the Black Drin River. It borders on Kosova to the east.

Lum i Bardhë
Settlement. There is a Lum i Bardhë, lit. 'White River,' in the District of Puka, also known as *Lumëbardha*.

Makalushi, Islam
Highland warrior.

Malcija e Madhe
Mountain range. The *Malcija e Madhe*, standard Alb. *Malësia e Madhe*, 'the Great Mountains,' refers to the Northern Albanian Alps, situated primarily in the present-day District of Malësia e Madhe.

Malësia

Alb. *malësi,* def. *malësia* 'highlands, mountains, mountain range', i.e. the Highland region of the northern Albanian tribes.

Mali, Smajl

Highland warrior from Buza e Ujit.

Mali, Sokol

Highland warrior.

Mandiq, Trifon

Montenegrin warrior.

Marina

Settlement in the Lim valley in southeastern Montenegro, situated half way between Plava and Andrijevica. Also Alb. *Morina*, ~ BCS *Murino*.

Maritsa

A river in the southeastern Balkans, known in Greek as the *Evros* and in Turkish as the *Meriç*. It flows through southern Bulgaria and, in Thrace, forms the border between Greece and Turkey until it reaches the Aegean Sea.

Markola, Bibë Llesh

Highland warrior from Mirdita.

Markola, Preng

Highland warrior from Mirdita, also known as Preng Mar' Kola.

Marku, Gjeto

Highland warrior from Hoti.

Marku, Gjokë

Highland warrior.

Marku, Kolec

Highland warrior. He died in battle in Rrashbull near Durrës on 15 August 1912.

Marku, Lukë

Highland warrior.

Marku, Vasil

Montenegrin warrior.

Marleka

Hillside near Lezha.

Martini rifle

The Martini or Martini-Henri rifle was a breech-loading, single-shot cartridge firearm designed by Friedrich von Martini (1822-1897) of Frauenfeld, Switzerland. Alb. *martinë*, def. *martina.*

Martinoviq

Settlement on the left bank of the upper Lim River between Gucia and Plava in southeastern Montenegro, now Alb. *Martinaj*, BCS *Martinovići.*

Mashi
Short form for the personal name Marash, e.g. in Marash Uci.

Mashi, Keqo
Highland warrior from Zagorja in Shkreli territory.

Mashi, son of Coku
cf. Coku, Mashi.

Mata, Juriq
Montenegrin warrior.

Matija, Prenkë
Highland warrior from Milot on the Mat River.

Matiniq
Montenegrin warrior and voyvode of Nikshiq.

Mauser rifle
A five-shot, repeating rifle or pistol, constructed by the brothers Paul von Mauser (1838-1914) and Wilhelm von Mauser (1834-1882) of Oberndorf (Neckar) in Germany. Alb. *mauzerr*, def. *mauzerri*, or *mauzer*, def. *mauzeri*.

Mbishkodra
The plain stretching from the town of Shkodra up to the Montenegrin border, along the eastern bank of Lake Shkodra, lit. 'above Shkodra.'

Mehmet Ali Pasha
Turkish governor of Gjakova. The episode of the death of Mehmet Ali Pasha in Canto 10 is based on Kosova folk songs. In Canto 11, 'The Vampire,' Mehmet Ali Pasha returns as a ghost to visits Prince Nikolla.

Mehmeti, Prêlë
Highland warrior.

Mehmeti, Sadri
Highland warrior, standard-bearer of the Gashi tribe.

Mehmeti, Uc
Highland warrior, father of Marash Uci.

Medjid
Turkish silver coin issued under the reign of Sultan Abdulmedjid (r. 1839-1861), Turkish *mecidiye, mecit.*

Mele
Name of a mountain nymph, related perhaps to Alb. *mel* 'millet.'

Mema, Sulë
Highland warrior from Vukli in Kelmendi tribal territory.

Mema, Sulë
Highland warrior from White River, Alb. *Lumi i Bardhë*, in the present District of Puka.

Merturi

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Merturi region is situated north and south of the Drin River in the Districts of Puka and Tropoja, basically the area to the west of the town of Fierza. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shoshi to the west, Nikaj to the north and northwest, Krasniqi to the east, and Berisha, with whom it is closely related, and Toplana to the south. The name was recorded in 1629 as *Marturi*. The Merturi tribe had a population of some 2,000 in the early years of the twentieth century.

Meta, Zeqir

Highland warrior, son of Man Halili.

Meteja

Settlement not far from the Komarusha River, four kilometres from Plava in southeastern Montenegro, ~ BCS *Meteh*. It is currently populated by BCS-speaking Muslims.

Metohija

Geographical region. Metohija is a BCS term, originally meaning 'church land,' which is used to designate western Kosova, i.e., the populated plain running from Peja down to Prizren. The term occurs in the common Slav designation for the whole territory: *Kosovo i Metohija* (Kosovo and Metohija), with Kosovo in this restricted sense referring only to the eastern half of the territory. The modern Albanian-language equivalent of Metohija is Dukagjini or Rrafshi i Dukagjinit (the Dukagjini Plateau).

Mhilli, Kik

Montenegrin warrior, also known as Kiku, son of Mhilli, who slew Smajl Aga in Stolac.

Miculi, Gjon Ujk

Highland warrior.

Mihajli, Nikë

Montenegrin warrior.

Mija, Drekalov

Montenegrin warrior. The Drekali were originally an Albanian tribe, but were gradually Slavicized and became the Drekalović.

Mijo, Vukotiq

Montenegrin warrior.

Milani, Mark

Montenegrin military leader. Mark Milani (1833-1901), ~ BCS *Marko Miljanov*, born in the mountains of Kuç, was a popular military figure and voyvode in Montenegro, who served under Prince Danilo and later under Prince Nikolla. At the age of forty-nine, he retired to the village of Medun, where he taught himself to read and write and became the

author of four works, including the 200-page treatise entitled *Život i običaje Arbanasa* (Life and Customs of the Albanians), Belgrade 1907. The historical Mark Milani began his attack on Plava and Gucia, commemorated in Cantos 18-21, on 4 December 1879.

Milani, Pal
Montenegrin commander under Prince Nikolla.

Mile
Name of a mountain nymph.

Milena
Queen of Montenegro and wife of Prince Nikolla. The historical Queen Milena (1847-1923), daughter of Petar Vukotić, married Prince Nikolla in 1860 and had six children. She followed her husband into exile in 1918 and died in Cap d'Antibes on the French Riviera.

Mili
Montenegrin warrior from Njegush.

Mili, Branko
Montenegrin warrior, son of Tomo Mili.

Mili, Tomo
Montenegrin warrior, father of Branko Mili.

Milica, Mark
Alternative name for Mark Milani.

Miliskau
A mountain in the District of Puka. Alb. *Miliská*, def. *Miliskáu*.

Milloshi
Name for a Montenegrin warrior.

Mine
Name of a mountain nymph.

Mirashi, Gjo'
Highland warrior.

Mirashi, Lik
Highland warrior.

Mirdita
Northern central Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Mirdita region corresponds broadly to the present District of Mirdita, though, as tribal land, it originally referred more specifically to the mountains north of Blinisht. The name was recorded in 1571 as *Mirdita* and in 1610 as *Miriditti* and is often said to be related to Alb. *mirë dita* 'good day,' though this is probably a folk etymology. Mirdita is traditionally a staunchly Catholic region, with its religious centre at the church of Saint Alexander in Orosh.

Miri, Djalë
Highland warrior, possibly the same as Nishk Djalë Miri.

Miri, Nishk Djalë
Highland warrior, possibly the same as Djalë Miri.

Miri, Prêlë
Highland warrior.

Miri, Ujk
Highland warrior from Vukli.

Mirko, Captain
Montenegrin warrior and counsellor of Prince Nikolla. He is also known as Mirko the Commander.

Mirko, Janjiq
Highland warrior, probably Mirko Janjiq.

Mokra e Shekullarit
Mountain region east of Andrijevica in southeastern Montenegro, between the Lim River and the border with Kosova. Mount Shekullari (940 m.) is one of the minor peaks, ~ BCS *Šekular.*

Mokset
A small hill in the District of Malësia e Madhe, between Bajza and Hani i Hotit, in Hoti tribal territory.

Molung
Mountain to the northeast of Lezha, near Mount Vela.

Montenegro
Mountainous country situated on the Adriatic coast to the north of Albania. Montenegro, Alb. *Mali i Zi*, ~ BCS *Crna Gora* or *Crnagora*, was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1479 to 1878. In the nineteenth century, it was, however, largely ruled by its native Montenegrin princes: Petar I (r. 1782-1830), Petar II (r. 1830-1851), Danilo (r. 1851-1860), and Nikolla [Nicholas] (r. 1860-1918). In 1878, Montenegro achieved independence under Prince Nikolla who declared himself king in 1910. Soon thereafter, however, in 1918, the country was encompassed within the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later to be known as Yugoslavia. It currently forms part of the federation of Serbia and Montenegro.

Moraça
River flowing from the interior of Montenegro past Podgorica and into Lake Shkodra, ~ BCS *Morača.*

Morina
cf. Marina.

Morina Pass
Settlement and mountain pass, Alb. *Qafa e Morinës* (568 m.), situated west of Gjakova. The Morina Pass is currently the major Albania-Kosova border crossing from the District of Tropoja to the Gjakova region. Fishta also refers to Marina Pass, meaning the one at Marina,

BCS Murino, between Plava and Andrijevica in southeastern Montenegro. It is a common toponym and there may be some confusion.

Mosi, Hilë

Warrior, political figure, poet and friend of Gjergj Fishta. Hilë Mosi (1885-1933) was born in Shkodra and attended an Italian elementary school and the Saverian College, founded by the Jesuits in 1877. For four years, ca. 1904-1908, he studied in Klagenfurt in southern Austria, training as a teacher. In 1911, he took an active part in the uprising in northern Albania and taught for a year at the Normal School (*Shkolla Normale*) in Elbasan. Mosi was a member of the Albanian Literary Commission in 1916, represented his native Shkodra in parliament from 1920 to 1924, and served as a member of the Albanian delegation to the League of Nations from November 1920. Under the Fan Noli government of 1924, he served as prefect of Korça and of Gjirokastra. In 1927, Mosi returned from exile to Albania under the amnesty proclaimed by Ahmet Zogu (1895-1961) and was made minister of public works. The following year, he worked as director-general of public security and, in 1930, as minister of education, a post he held until his death. Hilë Mosi is the author of patriotic verse and love lyrics written primarily between the years 1900 and 1925 and which were published in periodicals and in a small number of monographs; *Këngat shqipe* (Albanian Songs), Thessalonika 1909, his first poetry collection; followed by *Zân' i atdheut* (The Voice of the Homeland), Trieste 1913, a volume on nationalist themes.

Mostar

Town in Bosnia and Herzegovina situated on the Neretva River.

Mosul

Town in Kurdistan, northern Iraq, once part of the Ottoman Empire.

Muça, Jus

Highland warrior.

Mufti

A Muslim religious authority. In Islam, the mufti was the head of a legal school for a region.

Mula, Çun

Highland warrior. Çun Mula (1818-1896) was the bayraktar or standard-bearer of the Hoti tribe.

Munella

Mountain range forming the border between the Districts of Puka and Mirdita. Alb. *Munellë*, def. *Munella*, also *Mundella*. The highest peak of the range is Mali i Kryqit (1,991 m.)

Musa

Montenegrin warrior from Njegush.

Mustafa, Smajl

Highland warrior.

Muzaku

The Muzaku, ~ Ital. *Musachi*, were a noble, ruling family of landowners on the plain of central Albania in the late Byzantine period. This region, the Plain of Myzeqeja, is named after them. Prominent among the Muzaku was John or Giovanni Musachi (d. 1515), despot of Epirus.

Muzheli

Mountain peak in the Scanderbeg Range, Alb. *Mali i Skënderbeut*, which forms the natural border between the Districts of Kurbin and Mat, east of the town of Laç.

Myrto

Highland warrior, son of Can Faslia.

Myslimi, Hafiz

Muslim Albanian figure. The first name Hafiz is given to a person who has learned the Koran by heart or who is the guardian of a mosque.

Naplli Hill

A hill in the District of Malësia e Madhe, situated in Kastrati tribal territory. It is also called Napuj Hill, Alb. *Kodra e Napujevet.*

Nare

Name of a mountain nymph.

Naze

Name of a mountain nymph.

Ndoci, Kin

Highland warrior.

Ndoka, Lekë

Highland warrior.

Ndreka, Vasil

Montenegrin warrior who shoots Tringa, and is slain in revenge by Gjeto Gega.

Ndreu, Lulash

Young deacon of Father John of Kelmendi.

Neshi, Spiro

Montenegrin warrior.

Nevjestiq, Jovo

Montenegrin warrior.

New Kotor

Fictive toponym. One is led immediately to think of the Bay of Kotor, ~ Italian *Catarro*, on the coast of Montenegro. According to Maximilian Lambertz (1882-1963), however, New Kotor, which occurs in the

Songs of the Frontier Warriors of Albanian oral epic literature, refers rather to a region between the Lika and Krbava Rivers in western Croatia. Stavro Skendi (1905-1989) links New Kotor convincingly to *Ravni Kotari* (Plains of Kotar), below the present city of Zadar, explaining that the Albanians, who heard the BCS word *ravni* 'flat, plain,' associated it with the Albanian adjective *e re, e reja* 'new.'

Nicaj
Settlement in Shala tribal territory in the northern part of the District of Shkodra.

Nika, Dasha
Highland warrior.

Nika, Lulash
Highland warrior.

Nika, Tomë
Highland warrior.

Nikaj
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Nikaj region is situated north of the Drin River in the western part of the District of Tropoja. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shala to the west, Krasniqi to the east, and Merturi to the south. The Nikaj were the hereditary enemies of the Shala and Shoshi, and were considered, together with the Dushmani, to be among the wildest inhabitants of the northern mountains. The name was recorded in 1703 as *Nicagni, Nichagni* and seems to derive from the personal name Nicholas. The Nikaj tribe had a population of some 2,200 in the early years of the twentieth century.

Nikçi
Mountain settlement situated near Vukël in Kelmendi tribal territory, in the District of Malësia e Madhe. It was recorded in 1688 as *Nicaci*. Alb. *Nikç*, def. *Nikçi*.

Nikica
Montenegrin warrior from Andrijevica.

Nikiq
Surname for a Montenegrin fighter.

Nikita
Alternative form for Nikolla, i.e. Prince Nikolla of Montenegro.

Nikolla, Prince
The historical Prince Nikolla, also known as Nicholas I Petrović-Njegoš (1841-1921), was prince (r. 1860-1910) and later king (r. 1910-1918) of Montenegro. He was an imposing figure, important in the development of the Montenegrin state, and died in exile in Cap d'Antibes on the French Riviera.

Nikshiq

Town in central western Montenegro. Nikshiq, ~ BCS *Nikšić*, is situated on the Zeta River, fifty-five kilometres north of Podgorica.

Nishku, Lucë Prêlë

Highland warrior.

Njegosh, Petar Petrovich

The Montenegrin ruler and epic poet, Njegosh (1813-1851), ~ BCS *Petar Petrović Njegoš*, ruled Montenegro until his death. He was the author of the poetic drama, *Gorski Vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath), 1847, widely regarded as the Montenegrin and Serb national epic.

Njegush

Mountain village and region in Montenegro, situated on the road between Cetinje and Kotor. Njegush, also *Njegosh*, ~ BCS *Njegoši*, was the birthplace of the Montenegrin poet-prince Petar Petrovič Njegoš (1813-1851).

Nokshiq

Settlement near Marina, BCS Murino, in the upper Lim valley, north of Plava in southeastern Montenegro, ~ BCS *Novšići*. It is currently inhabited by Serbs.

Novica

Term for a long Montenegrin or Serb rifle.

Nuro, Oshi

cf. Oshi, son of Nuro.

Oka

Unit of weight used in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, equal to 1.28 kilograms or 2.75 pounds. Also Eng. *okka, oke*. Alb. *okë*, def. *oka*.

Ora

Female figure of northern Albanian mythology, known primarily north of the Drin River. This popular fairy, Alb. *orë*, def. *ora*, is much like a fairy godmother.

Oshi, son of Nuro

Tribesman, Alb. *Oshi i Nuros*, from the Fani region, who was in the pay of Abdullah Dreni in Gjakova. Although the men of Fani in Mirdita were primarily Catholics, they were much appreciated for their valour and loyalty by the Muslim landowners of Gjakova and of Kosova in general.

Oso Kuka

cf. Kuka, Oso.

Oso of Shas Alltuni

Highland warrior.

Ostrog
Montenegrin settlement near Bare Šumanovića in the Zeta Valley about half way between Podgorica and Nikšić.

Padishah
Title for the sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

Palabardhaj
Montenegrin tribe and traditional tribal region, ~ BCS *Bjelopavlići*.

Pali, Frano
Highland warrior.

Pali, Mirash
Highland warrior.

Palç
Settlement in Merturi tribal territory on the north bank of the Drin River in the District of Tropoja. Alb. *Palç*, def. *Palçi*, also known as *Palc*. It was recorded in 1634 as *Palci*.

Parnassus
Mountain (2,457 m.) in central Greece, which in ancient times was sacred to Dionysus, Apollo and the Muses.

Parûni
Mountain between the village of Plan in the northern part of the District of Shkodra and the Rrjoll River in the neighbouring District of Malësia e Madhe. Standard Alb. *Parun*, def. *Paruni*.

Pas vam nanu greba
BCS insult, meaning: "May the dogs 'scratch' your mother."

Pasha
Honorific title. A high-ranking member of the Ottoman elite.

Pashuku, Mark
Highland warrior.

Patani, Çul
Highland warrior, brother of Bec Patani, from Bzheta in Shkreli territory.

Patani, Bec
Highland warrior, brother of Çul Patani, from Bzheta in Shkreli territory. Bec Patani was the blood brother of the Montenegrin warrior Milo Spasi.

Pati, Murro
Highland warrior.

Patok
Settlement in the District of Kurbin, near the mouth of the Mat River.

Pavloviqi
Montenegrin warrior.

Pavo, Zvekan
Montenegrin warrior.

Peja
Town in western Kosova. Peja, ~ BCS *Peć*, Turkish *Ipek*, is situated on the banks of the Bistrica River, at the outlet of the Gorge of Rugova, which leads to the Rugova Highlands.

Pelaj
Settlement in Gruda tribal territory.

Pelasgians
Pre-Hellenic, no doubt mythical population of Greece and the southern Balkans. In legendry, the Albanians often regarded themselves as being the descendants of the ancient Pelasgians.

Pema, Shyta
Highland warrior.

Pepa, Tungj
Highland warrior, slain by Pipa Gërrzhiqi.

Pera, Gjukoviq
Montenegrin warrior and leader from Bijoca.

Pera, Kadiq
Montenegrin warrior.

Pera, Millosh
Montengrin warrior of the Vasoviqi tribe.

Pera, Rakiq
Montenegrin warrior.

Pera, Shkrapiq
Montenegrin warrior.

Pera, Tomiq
Highland warrior.

Peri, Zef
Highland warrior.

Pernjavori
Settlement, now an eastern suburb of Plava in southeastern Montenegro, ~ BCS *Prnjavan.*

Pervia
Settlement. Unidentified.

Peshkopia
Town and region of Albania near the current border with the Republic of Macedonia. It is the present-day administrative headquarters of the District of Dibra.

Peshteri
Mountain (1,611 m.) and region forming the border between eastern Montenegro and the Sandjak of Novi Pazar. This area was once

partially Albanian-speaking, but is now completely Slavic. Alb. *Peshter*, def. *Peshteri*, ~ BCS *Pešter*.

Petri, Gjin
Highland warrior from Kurbini.

Petrograd
Former name for the city of Saint Petersburg in Russia, residence of the tsar.

Pilaf
Rice boiled with salt and butter. From Persian and Turkish *pilav*.

Pjetroshani
Settlement situated four kilometres north of Koplik in the District of Malësia e Madhe. Alb. *Pjetroshan*, def. *Pjetroshani*.

Plava
Town now situated at the head of the Lim River in the mountains of southeastern Montenegro. Today, Plava, ~ BCS *Plav*, has a majority of BCS-speaking Muslims and some Albanians.

Pleuratus
Illyrian ruler and king of Shkodra in ca. 200 B.C. Pleuratus received the territory east of Durrës as an Illyrian province after the defeat of Philip V of Macedonia and the Treaty of Flaminius in 197 B.C. He was the father of King Genthius.

Plevanaci, Steva
Montenegrin warrior.

Plevia
Unidentified settlement, possibly near Plava in southeastern Montenegro.

Plevna
Town in northern central Bulgaria, ~ Bulg. *Pleven*. The poet is alluding to the Battle of Plevna during the Russian-Turkish War (1877-1878), in the course of which Russian forces, despite a heroic Ottoman defence, took the fortress town in December 1877 and forced the Ottoman Empire to capitulate in early 1878.

Pllanica
Settlement in the marshes near the northern bank of Lake Shkodra in Montenegro, seven kilometres east of Vranina, ~ BCS *Plavnica*.

Plluci, Gjo' Nik
Highland warrior.

Pllumi, Taro
Highland warrior from Jegumiri in Kastrati tribal territory.

Podgorica
Current capital and largest town of Montenegro, formerly Titograd.

Ponari

Tiny settlement near Zhablak, ~ BCS *Žabljak,* at the mouth of the Moraça River in Montenegro.

Postiba

Region north of Shkodra along the two banks of the Kir River. It was recorded as *Posterrippa* in 1641, from Lat. *post ripam* 'beyond the bank.' Modern Alb. *Postibë*, def. *Postriba*, also *Postrripë*, def. *Postrripa*.

Prêçi, Dodë

Highland warrior and bayraktar from Kastrati.

Prêçi, Vocerr

Highland warrior.

Prêçi, Zef

Highland warrior.

Preka, Gjeto

Highland warrior from Buza e Ujit on Lake Shkodra.

Prêtashi, Prêlë Nikë

Highland warrior from Kushja in Hoti tribal territory.

Prevlaka

Settlement in Montenegro, at the northern end of Lake Shkodra.

Prizren

Town in southwestern Kosova at the foot of the Sharri Mountains. Prizren was mentioned in the eleventh century when the lofty fortress overlooking the town was constructed. In 1204, the town fell to the Bulgarians and, in 1282, to the Serbs. The mediaeval history of the town is closely linked to the Serb king Stefan Dušan who held court there for some time. In 1455, Prizren was taken over by the Turks and, in 1570, it became capital of the sandjak. It was an important cultural centre throughout the centuries, for both Albanians and Serbs. In 1857, according to Alexander Hilferding, Prizren was inhabited by 3,000 Muslim families, 900 Orthodox families and 100 Catholic families. In the Ottoman census of 1876, it had 43,922 inhabitants, thus making it one of the largest towns in the Balkans.

Prizren, League of

cf. League of Prizren.

Puka

Town and region east of Shkodra and south of the Drin River, corresponding more or less to the present District of Puka. The word Puka, recorded in ancient Greek as *Epicaria* and in Latin as *Ad Piccaria* or *Adpicaria*, is said to be derived from Latin *via publica* 'public road.'

Pula, Isuf

Highland warrior.

Putani, Let
Highland warrior from the Dukagjini region.

Pyrrhus
Pyrrhus (319-272 B.C.), King of the Molossi in Epirus, was driven from his kingdom at the instigation of Cassander but returned to power in 297 B.C. with the help of Ptolemy I. He aspired to win the throne of Macedon and to emulate Alexander the Great. Though he gained much territory in Macedonia, he lost out to his brother-in-law Demetrius Poliorcetes and was forced to flee. He is remembered in particular for having aided the Tarentines in their battle against Rome in 280. At Heraclea he defeated the Roman consul Laevinus, but with such heavy losses that the battle entered history as a 'Pyrrhic victory.' He was finally defeated by the Romans at Beneventum in 275, and withdrew to his native Epirus, where he made himself master of Macedonia once again in 273. The following year he was killed in a riot in Argos, reportedly by a tile flung by a woman from a rooftop. In view of his Epirotic origins, he is regarded in Albanian legendry as an ancestor of the Albanians.

Qafa e Boshit
A mountain pass, lit. 'Bosh Pass' (1,365 m.), situated under Mount Bosh (1637 m.) and leading from Plan in the northern part of the District of Shkodra eastwards to Gimaj in Shala tribal territory.

Qafa e Diellit
A mountain pass, lit. 'pass of the sun,' situated on the trail between Plava in southeastern Montenegro and the Rugova Highlands in western Kosova.

Qafa e Kalás
A mountain pass, lit. 'pass of the fortress,' situated at the end of the Hoti arm of Lake Shkodra, not far from the present Albanian-Montenegrin border-crossing at Hani i Hotit.

Qehaja, Jup
Highland warrior.

Qemosku Plain
Plain in Montenegro, situated between Podgorica and Lake Shkodra.

Qorri, Ali
A Turkish major in Shkodra, slain by Bec Patani.

Qoshja, Beqo
Highland warrior.

Quku
Mountain in the District of Tropoja. It is also known as *Qurku*.

Rade, Stojan
Montenegrin warrior.

Radiqi

Surname for a Montenegrin warrior.

Radovani, Milosh

Montenegrin warrior from Ostrog.

Radoviqi, Vulo

Montenegrin warrior. Commander of the Vasoviqi.

Rahova

Settlement near Podgorica in Montenegro.

Raja

Settlement near Fierza in the District of Tropoja. It was subsequently known as Breglumi. Alb. *Rajë*, def. *Raja*.

Raki

Strong spirit distilled in the Balkans and Turkey. Alb. *raki*, def. *rakia*, derives from Turkish *raki*.

Rama, Sadik

Highland warrior.

Râna e Hjedhun

Lit. 'scattered sand.' Râna e Hjedhun could refer to the Albanian coastline in general, to a sandbank on the Drin River, or possibly to the Arta region of Epirus, now in Greece. If it is the latter, then "Râna e Hjedhun and Ura e Vezirit" in Canto 12: 47 would mean all the territory from Arta in the south to Kukës in the north.

Rapsha e Hotit

Settlement in Hoti tribal territory in the District of Malësia e Madhe, not far from the Montenegrin border.

Rapuka, Lul

Highland warrior.

Rasë-Fik

Settlement in the District of Malësia e Madhe, situated on the plain of Bajza in Kastrati tribal territory.

Rayah

Term for the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. The word, Alb. *rajë*, def. *raja*, derives originally from Arabic *ra'iyah* 'herd, flock.'

Raze

Name of a mountain nymph.

Razna

Settlement, now Razën, in Kastrati tribal territory. It is situated on the southern side of Mount Veleçik.

Reç

Village and traditional tribal region. The region of Reç is situated north of Shkodra in the District of Malësia e Madhe, about eight kilometres east of Koplik. It was recorded in 1416 as *Reci*. There is also another

Reç in the District of Dibra, towards the border with the Republic of Macedonia. Alb. *Reç*, def. *Reçi*,

Reka

There are also two villages in Kosova called Reka: one in the Rugova Highlands near Peja, Reka e Allagës, and one northwest of Kaçanik. There is also a region called Reka, north of Dibra in the Republic of Macedonia. In Canto 8: 26, Fishta uses Reka as a rhyme for Zeka and it is unclear to which he is referring.

Rijeka

Settlement in Montenegro at the northern end of Lake Shkodra, now called Rijeka Crnojeviča, on the road from Cetinje to Virpazar. It is not to be confused with Rijeka in Croatia. The term in BCS means 'river.'

Rista

Montenegrin warrior.

Risto

Highland warrior, son of Savo Sula.

Risto, Toma

Montenegrin warrior.

Riza Pasha

Ottoman commander of the fortress in Shkodra. Hasan Riza Pasha (1871-1913) was born in Baghdad as the son of Namik Pasha, Vali of Baghdad, and studied at military academies in Istanbul and Germany. He arrived in Shkodra in 1911 and was made governor of the region on 7 March 1912. Fishta knew him personally and admired him. He was assassinated in Shkodra on 30 January 1913.

Rodiqi, Mhill

Montenegrin warrior.

Rogova

Settlement in western Kosova on the White Drin River between Gjakova and Prizren. Rogova is not to be confused with Rugova, the highland region west of Peja. Alb. *Rogovë,* def. *Rogova,* also spelled *Rrogova.*

Rozafat

The fortress of Shkodra. Rozafat is also the name of the main female figure in the legend of the construction of the castle.

Rraboshta

Settlement in the District of Lezha, situated eight kilometres north of the town of Lezha. Alb. *Rraboshtë*, def. *Rraboshta*. It was recorded in 1689 as *Rabostia*.

Rragami

Settlement and mountainous region in the District of Tropoja at the head of the Valbona Valley, and to the south of Mount Jezerca. Alb. *Rragam,* def. *Rragami,* also *Rrogam,* def. *Rrogami.*

Rreja

Region and river in Mirdita, east of Lezha, at the foot of Mount Vela. The toponym Rreja was recorded in 1621 by Benedetto Orsini as *Reia.* The Rreja River is a tributary of the Fan and Mat. Alb. *Rrejë,* def. *Rreja.*

Rrushkull

Settlement north of Durrës, near the mouth of the Erzen River. There are other settlements called Rrushkull in the Districts of Shkodra and Mirdita. The battle referred to in Canto 28, which took place in mid-August 1912, actually happened in Rrashbull, between Durrës and Shijak, not in Rrushkull.

Rrustemi, Ram

Fighter from the Gjakova region.

Rrzhanica, Bridge of

Bridge over the Cem (Cijevna) River south of Podgorica, on the road to Tuz. The battle of the Bridge of Rrzhanica took place between Montenegrin and Albanian forces in April 1880.

Rubik

Settlement in the District of Mirdita, situated east of Lezha on the Mat River. On a promontory above the town is a parish church known in the seventeenth century as *San Salvator de Rebico.* Alb. *Rubik,* def. *Rubiku,* ~ Italian *Rubigo.*

Rugova

Highland region west of Peja in Kosova, ~ Alb. *Rugovë,* def. *Rugova.* It is not to be confused with Rogova, a village in Kosova between Gjakova and Prizren.

Rumelia

Historical term for Turkey-in-Europe, i.e. the possessions of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan Peninsula, in particular Albania, Macedonia, Thrace and part of Bulgaria.

Rumia

Mountain (1,594 m.) and region of Montenegro situated between Lake Shkodra and Bar on the Adriatic coast, ~ BCS *Rumija.*

Sadiku, Hamz

Highland warrior.

Sadrija, Xhem
Highland warrior from the Rugova mountains west of Peja. His father, Sadri Syku, is commemorated in folk verse as a *plak budall* 'silly old man.'

Saladini, Captain
Name for a Turkish officer.

Sallsatik
Settlement said to be near Kruja. The reference may be to the cave of the Bektashi holy man, Sari Salltëk, at the top of Mount Kruja.

Salonica
City in northern Greece, also called Thessalonica or Thessaloniki.

Samoborr
One-time fortification and small settlement in Hoti tribal territory on the banks of Lake Shkodra.

Sava, Gjokë
Montenegrin warrior.

Savo, Nehmanj
Montenegrin warrior.

Scanderbeg
cf. Castriota, George.

Sela, Man
Highland warrior. Probably the same as Osman Sela.

Sela, Osman
Highland warrior. Probably the same as Man Sela.

Selimi, Çun
Highland warrior, father of Sadri Çuni.

Selita
Mountain east of Kallmet in the District of Lezha, bordering on Mirdita. There are also settlements of this name in the Districts of Kurbin, Tirana, Elbasan and Fier. Alb. *Selitë*, def. *Selita*.

Selmani, Selim
Highland warrior from Plevia. Son of Selman Ymeri.

Serdari, Gjokë
Montenegrin warrior.

Serdari, Pavlo
Montenegrin warrior.

Serdari, Vllah
Montenegrin warrior.

Sevastopol
Town in the Crimea on the Black Sea. Sevastopol was the site of a long siege (1854-1855) during the Crimean War.

Seven Kings

The Seven Kings, Alb. *të shtat krajlat*, were symbolic in Albanian oral literature of the Great Powers of Europe, in particular in the early years of the twentieth century. The Seven Kings, i.e. Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia, actually also include Turkey, although the poet usually counts the sultan separately.

Shabi, Turk

Highland warrior from Kelmendi.

Shala

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Shala region is situated in the Dukagjini area north of the Drin River in the District of Shkodra, basically the valley of the Shala River south of Theth. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Boga, Shkreli and Plani to the west, Shoshi to the south, and Nikaj to the east. The name was recorded in Italian in 1634 as *Sciala* and is said to derive from Alb. *shalë, shalësinë* 'arid, infertile land.' The Shalas, primarily Catholics, are closely related to the Shoshi tribe and traditionally had connections with Mirdita. They had a population of over 3,000 in the late nineteenth century. Shala Ridge, Alb. *Biga e Shalës*, is a mountain (2,230 m.) west of the Shala valley.

Sharri

The Sharri or Sharr Mountain Range, Alb. *Malet e Sharrit*, is situated in the south of Kosova along the border with the Republic of Macedonia. It extends for about eighty kilometres from the Albanian border and Prizren in the west to the southern part of the Plain of Kosova near Kaçanik in the east. Alb. *Sharr*, def. *Sharri*, ~ BCS *Šar Planina*.

Shasi

Lake, archeological site and mediaeval settlement near the mouth of the Buna River, on the Montenegrin side of the present border with Albania. At its zenith during the Middle Ages, Shasi or Shas was a port for trade with the countries of the Adriatic. It was known in Latin as *Suacium,* in Italian as *Suazzo* or *Sfazzi*, in mediaeval Slavic as *Svač*, and in early French as *Soans*. It was first documented in 1067. Shasi was plundered by the Tatars in 1242 and began to decay around the end of the fourteenth century. It was finally razed by Ottoman troops in 1406. The lake, Alb. *Liqeni i Shasit*, ~ BCS *Šasko jezero*, was formed by a loop in the Buna River.

Shejshana

Term for a heavy, single-shot, muzzle-loading rifle,~ Bulgarian *шешане*, both from Turkish *şeşhane* 'six compartments,' a rifle with a six-sided gunstock.

Shipshanik
Hill and settlement just to the west of Tuz in Montenegro, ~ BCS *Šipčanik*.

Shkja
Term for a Slav. This word *shkja* refers essentially to the Slav peoples neighbouring the Albanians, i.e. the Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians. In modern usage, the Alb. term *shkja*, def. *shkjau*, plur. *shkji*, often has negative connotations, as opposed to the more neutral Alb. *sllav*, def. *sllavi*.

Shkodra
Largest city of northern Albania. Situated on Lake Shkodra and the banks of the Buna River, Shkodra is the cultural capital of northern Albania. It is known for its impressive Rozafat fortress, where a settlement of the Illyrian Labeates tribe was situated. In 180-168 B.C., Shkodra was the residence of the Illyrian king Genthius. Under Diocletian (r. 284-305 A.D.) it became capital of the Roman province of Praevalitana and was the seat of a bishop by the fourth century. In 1043, it was conquered by the Slavic rulers of Montenegrin Zeta and served as their capital. In 1180, it was taken over by Stephen Nemanja and remained Serb until the collapse of the Nemanja dynasty. It then served as capital of the local Balsha dynasty until it was conquered by the Venetians in 1396. Finally, in January 1479, it fell to the Ottoman Turks after a long siege. Shkodra was the greatest city of Albania throughout the Ottoman period. In April 1913, it was taken over by Montenegrin forces but was returned to Albania in accordance with the provision of the London Conference of Ambassadors. It remained Albania's cultural capital until World War II. In 1939, it had a population of 30,000. Alb. *Shkodër*, def. *Shkodra*, ~ Latin *Scodra*, Italian *Scutari*, BCS *Skadar*, Turkish *Iskenderiye*.

Shkumbin
River in central Albania, flowing past Elbasan into the Adriatic about thirty kilometres south of Durrës. The Shkumbin, def. Shkumbini, ancient *Genessus* or *Scampis*, marks the traditional border between northern and southern Albania.

Shkreli
Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Shkreli region is situated in the upper valley of the Përroi i Thatë (Dry Torrent) in the District of Malësia e Madhe. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kastrati to the northwest, and Boga and Plani to the east. The name was recorded in 1614 as *Scarglieli*, and, in 1703, as *Scrielli*. Edith Durham derives the term from *Shën Kerli*, i.e. St. Carlo, possibly the patron saint of a church there.

Shllaku

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Shllaku region is situated in the District of Shkodra north of the Drin River and south of Mount Cukali, about halfway between Shkodra and Koman. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Drisht and Shoshi to the north, and Dushmani to the east. The name was recorded in 1641 as *Scelacu*. The staunchly Catholic Shllaku tribe, said to be an offshoot of the Toplanas, had a population of 1,500 in 1922.

Shllaku, Gjetë Gegë

Highland leader who attended the League of Prizren.

Shoshi

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The Shoshi region is situated in the Dukagjini area north of the Drin River in the District of Shkodra, in the valley of the Shala River. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shala to the north, Toplana and Dushmani to the east, and Shllaku to the south. The name was recorded in Italian in 1703 as *Sciosci*. The Catholic Shoshi tribe had a population of 1,600 in 1908.

Shpendi, Mehmet

Highland warrior from Shala. Mehmet Shpendi (1851-1915) took part in combat in 1879-1880 to defend Plava and Gucia. He was the first to have the institution of the *djelmnia* 'young lads' recognized in Shala tribal law, i.e. a band of autonomous young warriors as opposed to the elders and older warriors who traditionally made all the decisions for the tribe. Shpendi also led uprisings in Dukagjini in 1910-1912. He was murdered in Plan in 1915.

Shpërdhaza

River, tributary of the Fan i Madh River, in the District of Mirdita. It was recorded in 1621 as *Spertasa*.

Shpuza

Settlement on the Zeta River between Podgorica and Danilovgrad in Montenegro, ~ BCS *Spuž*. It was formerly inhabited by Albanian Muslims, and its fortress was once appreciated by the Bushatlli dynasty and by the Ottoman authorities for the strategic defence of the Shkodra-Podgorica region. There was a battle between Ottoman-Albanian and Montenegrin forces at Shpuza in 1860, and more fighting there in 1876-1877.

Shtatzarana

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'body like a reed,' from Alb. *shtat* 'body,' and *zaran*, def. *zarani*, 'sugar cane, reed, rushes.'

Shtozovalle

Figure of northern Albanian mythology. The term *shtozovalle,* def. *shtozovallja,* also *shtojzovalle,* deriving from Alb. *shtoj* 'to add,

increase,' *zot* 'god' and *valle* 'dance,' i.e. "may God give increase to their dance," and alternatively known as *shtojzorreshta* "may God give increase to their rows," is no doubt a euphemism for some earlier taboo term, probably for the *zana* (q.v.) with whom *shtozovalles* seem to have much in common. These fair creatures with supernatural powers and exceptional beauty inhabit the dense forests and alpine pastures where they spend their time in song and dance. They can hover in the air and, at night, they spin the threads of human fate.

Shtrumore
Name of a mountain nymph.

Shumla
Turkish fortress in Bulgaria, site of a siege in 1774 during the Russian-Turkish War.

Shyti, Prelë Kolë
Highland warrior.

Sinan / Sinanaja / Sinani
Highland warrior under the command of Oso Kuka.

Sinan Aya
Name for a Turkish warrior.

Sinan Pasha
Young Turk member of the Committee for Progress and Unity, Turkish *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, in Istanbul in 1908.

Smajl Aga of Çengiq
Ottoman official in Stolac, Herzegovina.

Smajli, Alush
Highland warrior from Hoti i Kujit, son of Smajl Hasani.

Smajli, Mêm
Highland warrior.

Smajli, Zyber
Highland warrior from Reç.

Sofia
Capital city of Bulgaria.

Sokoli, Jovo
Montenegrin warrior, slain by Muç Hasi.

Sokoli, Lik
Highland warrior from Gegëhyseni in Krasniqi tribal territory in the District of Tropoja.

Sopat
Mountain said to be situated in the Pindus range near Mount Pelister in the southwestern part of the Republic of Macedonia.

Sotiri, Lez
Montenegrin warrior.

Spaçi
Settlement in Mirdita, near Orosh in the valley of the Lesser Fani River. Alb. *Spaç*, def. *Spaçi*.

Spasi, Milo
Montenegrin warrior from Rahova. Blood brother of Bec Patani.

Spasi, Miter
Montenegrin warrior from Gjurakoci in Kosova.

Spîja
Settlement in Montenegro, southeast of Tuz, ~ BCS *Spilja*.

Staka, Gjeto
Highland warrior.

Stamboul
Alternative term for the city of Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire and residence of the Turkish sultan.

Stana, Tvrdko
Montenegrin warrior.

Stani, Llazo
Montenegrin warrior.

Stani, Savo
Montenegrin warrior.

Stanja
Name for a Montenegrin woman, wife of a Montenegrin warrior.

Stanku
Montenegrin warrior.

Starja
Settlement near Rapsha in Hoti territory, not far from the Montenegrin border.

Steva, Bogiq
Montenegrin warrior.

Stjepani, Gjokë
Montenegrin warrior.

Stjepani, Nikë
Montenegrin warrior.

Stojani
First name for a Montenegrin warrior.

Stojani, Risto
Montenegrin warrior.

Stoke
Name for a Montenegrin mother.

Stolac
Town in Herzegovina, situated between Mostar and Dubrovnik.

Stork Mountain

Stork Mountain, Alb. *Maja e Lejlekut*, lit. 'Stork Peak,' is situated somewhere in the upper Lim valley in southeastern Montenegro.

Strellc

Village in western Kosova, Alb. *Strellc*, def. *Strellci*, also *Strelc* and *Shtrelc* ~ BCS *Streoc*, situated between Peja and Deçan. The reference in Canto 17: 541 is not to Strellc itself, but to the *Bjeshkët e Strellcit* 'pastures of Strellc,' the high mountain pastures behind Plava, on the Montenegrin side of the border, which belonged to the herdsmen of Strellc.

Streza

Noble ruling family and comrades-in-arms of Scanderbeg in fifteenth-century Albania.

Sula, Savo

Highland warrior, father of Risto.

Suta and Pasuta

Names of witches. Alb. *sutë*, def. *suta*, is actually a doe. As a figure of Albanian mythology, it usually appears as a cow-like form and can be ridden. In mythology, there is also Alb. *dhëmbësutë*, def. *dhëmbësuta*, Gheg *dhamsuta*, lit. 'tooth hind,' which appears as is a deaf and dumb mare that one can ride to escape from danger.

Sutjeska

Battle site in the upper Lim valley, about three kilometres north of Marina, BCS Murino, between Plava and Andrijevica in southeastern Montenegro, ~ BCS Stućeska. Unrelated to this is another region called Sutjeska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, near the Montenegrin border.

Syku, Nikë

A wealthy shepherd.

Syne

Name of a mountain nymph.

Tale

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'high plateau.'

Talja

Settlement in the District of Lezha, situated near the mouth of the Mat River. Alb. *Tale*, def. *Talja*.

Taraba, Jak

Montenegrin warrior.

Tekke

Monastery or lodge of the Bektashi order of dervishes. Alb. *teqe*, def. *teqja*.

Temali

Northern Albanian tribe and traditional tribal region. The zone of the small Temali tribe is situated in the Dukagjini area, east of Shkodra.

Tere

Name of a mountain nymph, from Alb. *terë*, def. *tera* 'dry land.'

Tetova

Town in the western part of the Republic of Macedonia. Alb. *Tetovë*, def. *Tetova*, ~ BCS *Tetovo*, Turkish *Kalkandelen*..

Teuta

Illyrian queen who reigned from Lezha (ancient Lissus). Teuta was the widow of Agron, and acted from 231 B.C. onwards as regent for her stepson Pinneus. Her ships and pirates plundered Roman merchant vessels and interfered with Roman trade routes in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Rome sent envoys to her in Shkodra to demand reparations but to no avail. In 229 B.C., Rome declared war on Illyria and sent armies to the Balkans for the first time, as well as a fleet of 200 ships to back up operations. Teuta surrendered in 227 B.C. and, having acknowledged Rome's superiority and having paid tribute, was allowed to retain her throne in the Shkodra-Lezha region. Today, many Albanian women bear the name Teuta in her honour.

Thrake

Name of a mountain nymph, meaning no doubt the 'Thracian one.'

Tile

Name of a mountain nymph.

Timar

In the Ottoman Empire, a *timar* was an estate or grant of land in exchange for military service.

Tivari

The town of Bar, situated on the southern Montenegrin coast and formerly constituting the northern limit of Albanian-language settlement along the Adriatic coast. Alb. *Tivar,* def. *Tivari,* ~ Latin *Antibarium*, Italian *Antivari,* BCS *Bar.*

Todor

Name for a Montenegrin warrior.

Tomorr, Mount

Mount Tomorr, also *Tomor* and ancient *Tomaros*, is a mountain range in the region of Berat and Skrapar which includes the highest peak in central Albania, at an altitude of 2,417 metres. It is considered the home of the gods in central Albanian popular belief, and is sacred both to the Christians, who used to climb it on August 15, Assumption Day, in honour of the Virgin Mary, and to the Bektashi, who honour Abbas Ali during an annual pilgrimage on August 20-25. The legendary figure of

Father Tomorr (Baba Tomorr) is envisaged as an old man with a long white beard flowing down to his belt. Around him hover four long-beaked female eagles, which perch on his snowy slopes. According to Maximilian Lambertz (1882-1963), he is the remnant of some ancient Illyrian god. The cult of Mount Tomorr is linked in particular to the romantic nationalism of the Rilindja age of national revival, and is mirrored especially in the literature of the period. Albanian writers such as Konstantin Kristoforidhi, Naim bey Frashëri, Andon Zako Çajupi, Asdreni, Hilë Mosi, and Ndre Mjeda have all devoted evocatively striking poetry and prose pieces to Father Tomorr.

Tona, Soko

Highland warrior from Guri i Lekës, gifted in the art of prophesy.

Toptani

The Toptanis were a ruling family from central Albania. Most noted among them was the political figure, Essad Pasha Toptani (1863-1920). Essad Pasha was early to gain a reputation as an unscrupulous opportunist. In 1908, he joined the Young Turks and became a member of the Turkish parliament. He was accused, in April 1913, of having assassinated Hasan Riza Pasha (1871-1913), commander of Shkodra, and of turning the fortress of Shkodra over to Montenegro, in order to gain Montenegrin support for his rule in central Albania, his traditional power base. This was in contradiction to the decision of the Conference of the Ambassadors in London which had assigned Shkodra to Albania. On 16 October 1913, to frustrate Ismail Qemal bey Vlora (1844-1919), the power-hungry Toptani set up a rival government based in Durrës, called the Republic of Central Albania. He reluctantly stepped down when forced to by the Great Powers on 1 February 1914. Under Prince Wilhelm zu Wied (1876-1945), the scheming Toptani served as minister of war and minister of the interior. He was assassinated in Paris in 1920 by Avni Rustemi (1895-1924). The references in the Highland Lute, in Cantos 9: 197 and 15: 120, are no doubt to the father of Essad Pasha.

Toshi, Pjetër Gjokë

Highland warrior.

Tosk

The term Tosk refers to the southern Albanians, i.e., all Albanians living south of the Shkumbin River and speaking Tosk dialects. The territory of the Tosks is poetically referred to as Toskëria. The northern Albanians are called Ghegs.

Toskëria

Southern Albania or land of the Tosks.

Traboina
Settlement in Montenegro. Traboina, also *Traboin*, ~ BCS *Trabojin*, is situated south of the upper Cem (Cijevna) River valley in Hoti tribal territory, very close to the Albanian border.

Treskavica
Settlement and tributary of the upper Lim River in southeastern Montenegro. It is to be found in the valley east of Plava, ~ BCS *Treskovic*.

Tringa
Highland heroine. Tringa, whom Fishta tells us is the daughter of Ulë Keqota and the sister of Curr Ula, was of the Gruda tribe. The account in Canto 22 of her caring for her dying brother is inspired by the folktale of Gjergj Elez Alia. The name Tringa is related to Caterina, thus English Catherine. Also of inspiration to the poet may have been the historical Tringa: Tringa e Smajl Martinit of Gruda (1870-1917), who took part in the uprising of 1911 against Ottoman forces.

Trobojnica
BCS term for the 'three-coloured' flag of the Montenegrins and Serbs.

Trojani
Mountain to the west of Gucia. Its peak (2,194 m.) forms part of the Albanian-Montenegrin border in Kelmendi tribal territory. Alb. *Trojan*, def. *Trojani*, ~ BCS *Trojan*.

Tuku, Gjoka
Highland warrior.

Tuku, Marka
Highland warrior.

Tuli, Prêlë
Highland warrior from Salca in Merturi. Nephew of Basho Jana.

Turgut Pasha
Young Turk member of the Committee for Progress and Unity, Turkish *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, in Istanbul in 1908.

Turkoshak
Pejorative term for an Anatolian Turk.

Tusha
Blacksmith and weapon-maker in Shkodra.

Tuz
Settlement and market town in Montenegro, situated between Podgorica and Lake Shkodra, on the road to Albania. Alb. *Tuz*, def. *Tuzi*, ~ BCS *Tuzi*.

Uci, Marash
Highland warrior. Fishta met the aged Marash Uci (1810-1914) of Rapsha in Hoti in about 1902. In their evenings together, Marash Uci

told the young priest of the heroic battles between the Albanian highlanders and the Montenegrins, in particular of the famed battle at the Rrzhanica Bridge in which Marash Uci had taken part himself. Their meetings proved to be of great inspiration to the poet. Mashi is the short form for Marash.

Uci, Pjeter
Highland warrior.

Udri, Tvrdko, Bog te ubijo
BCS expression, meaning "Forwards, Tvrdko, may God kill you!"

Ujka, Dedë Gjon
Highland warrior.

Ujka, Gjeto Mark
Highland warrior.

Uka, Rrustem
Highland warrior from Gjakova or from the mountains of Peja, son of Ukë Kabashi.

Ula, Curr
Highland warrior. Son of Ulë Keqota and brother of Tringa. The account of his death in Canto 22 is inspired by the folktale of Gjergj Elez Alia.

Ungrej
Settlement in the District of Lezha, situated in the mountains about twenty kilometres northeast of the town of Lezha.

Ura e Vezirit
Lit. the 'Vizier's Bridge.' The five-arched, 200-metre-long Ottoman Vizier's Bridge, of which photos still exist, once straddled the Drin River near Kukës in northeastern Albania.

Vace
Name of a mountain nymph.

Valbona
Settlement, valley and river situated in the District of Tropoja. The river is a tributary of the *Drin*. The word Valbona derives from the Latin *vallis bona* 'good valley.'

Vali Pasha
Ottoman dignitary in Shkodra.

Vasa, Gjoka
Montenegrin warrior.

Vasil
Montenegrin warrior.

Vasoviqi
Montenegrin tribe and region along the Lim River in eastern Montenegro. Alb. *Vasoviq*, def. *Vasoviqi*, ~ BCS *Vasojevići*.

Vata, Kolë Marash
Highland warrior.

Vata, Marash
Highland warrior from Shkreli.

Vata, Mark Ujkë
Highland warrior.

Vata, Prêlë Ujkë
Highland warrior.

Vathnore
Name of a mountain nymph, meaning 'guardian of a sheep pen.'

Vela
Mountain (1,171 m.) to the east of Lezha, dividing the regions of Zadrima and Mirdita.

Veleçik
Mountain (1,732 m.) in the District of Malësia e Madhe, situated between Hoti and Kastrati tribal territory, not far from the Montenegrin border.

Veneranda
Christian saint. Veneranda, Alb. *Shënepremte*, *Prende,* Gheg *Shnaprendjet* and *Prenne,* ~ BCS *Petka*, Greek *Paraskevi*, Romanian *Sfânta Paraschiva*, was originally a pre-Christian deity and came to be identified in the Catholic Church with Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. She has been linked to the cult of Venus, hence her Latin name *Veneranda*, ~ Romanian *Sfânta Vineri*. Etymologically, Venus has given us the Romance term for Friday, ~ Latin *dies veneris*, Italian *venerdì*, French *vendredi,* which translates into Albanian as *e premte,* def. *e premtja,* hence the Albanian forms mentioned above. Her feast day is July 26, also the feast of Saint Anne.

Vermoshi
Northernmost town in Albania, in Kelmendi tribal territory in the District of Malësia e Madhe. Alb. *Vermosh*, def. *Vermoshi*.

Vilayet
A province of the Ottoman Empire governed by a *vali*. Alb. *vilajet*, def. *vilajeti*, from Turkish *vilâyet*.

Viri
Small river flowing into Lake Shkodra near Virpazar, the 'bazaar on the Vir.' Alb. *Vir*, def. *Viri*, ~ BCS *Vir*.

Vishnjeva
Tiny settlement about two kilometres southeast of Gucia in southeastern Montenegro.

Vitoja

Area of flat land in Montenegro, situated between Vuksanlekaj, south of Tuz, and the Albanian border-crossing.

Vizier

Term for ministers or high officials of the Ottoman Empire. Alb. *vezir*, def. *veziri*, from Turkish *vezir*. The reference to the vizier in Canto 19: 466 is said to be to Ahmed Pasha Bushatlliu, the virtually independent vizier of Shkodra, who constructed a stone bridge in Podgorica in the eighteenth century.

Vizitor

Mountain (2,211 m.) west of Plava in southeastern Montenegro. Alb. *Vizitor*, def. *Vizitori*, ~ BCS *Visitor*.

Vlora

Vlora is the largest town in southern Albania and the country's second largest port, situated in the expansive bay of Vlora. Settlement here goes back at least to the fourth century B.C. It was originally known as Aulon from the Greek word *aulôn* 'ditch, channel.' This word evolved into mediaeval Latin *Avlona,* Turkish *Avlonya,* Italian *Valona* and modern Albania *Vlora.* On 28 November 1912, Vlora was the venue of the declaration of Albanian independence by Ismail Qemal bey Vlora (1844-1919). It can thus be said to have been the first capital of Albania.

Vokrri, Gjo' Ndue

Highland warrior.

Voyvode

Military title of Slavic origin, something like a captain. In the Ottoman Empire, the voyvode, also voyvod, was a military agent appointed by a governor to oversee tax collection. In the mountains of northern Albania, the voyvode was often simply the head of a leading tribal family.

Vraka

Little market town seven kilometres north of Shkodra. Until recently, Vraka had a substantial Montenegrin, i.e. Slavic-speaking, population. It was known in Fishta's time for the pumpkins and gourds of its vegetable gardens. Alb. *Vrakë*, def. *Vraka*.

Vrioni

Noble ruling family in southern Albania. The Vrionis, with their power base in Berat, owned much of the farmland in southern central Albania from the Middle Ages to the first half of the twentieth century. Among the noted figures of this family was the politician, Iljaz bey Vrioni (1882-1932), who was prime minister of Albania in 1920-1921 and in

1924, and foreign minister in 1927-1929. He was the son of Mehmet Ali Pasha.

Vranina

Settlement and island on Lake Shkodra, situated off the main road from Podgorica to the Adriatic coast, just before crossing the lake. Alb. *Vraninë*, def. *Vranina*, ~ BCS *Vrnjina, Vranjina.* The fortifications are now in ruins.

Vuçeniq, Pavlo

Montenegrin warrior.

Vuçeniqi

Montenegrin warrior.

Vukadini, Jozja

Montenegrin warrior.

Vukli

Mountain settlement situated in Kelmendi tribal territory, in the District of Malësia e Madhe. Alb. *Vukël*, def. *Vukli*. In was recorded in 1689 as *Vkali*.

Vukotiq

Montenegrin warrior and leader.

Vuku, the Commander

Montenegrin warrior, and lieutenant of Prince Nikolla. He was slain by Lucë Gjeloshi.

Vuthaj

Settlement about four kilometres south of Gucia in southeastern Montenegro. Alb. *Vuthaj*, def. *Vuthajt*, ~ BCS *Vusanje.*

White River

There is a White River, Alb. *Lumi i Bardhë*, in the District of Puka. It is a tributary of the *Arrëz*, *Fan i Madh*, *Fan* and *Mat* Rivers.

Wilhelm

Wilhelm II (1859-1941) was the Kaiser or Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia (r. 1888-1918). He was forced to abdicate at the end of World War I, and lived thereafter in exile in Holland until his death.

Xhaxha, Car

Highland warrior.

Xhâj

Settlement in Shkreli tribal territory in the District of Malësia e Madhe.

Xhavid Pasha

Young Turk member of the Committee for Progress and Unity, Turkish *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, in Istanbul in 1908. Also known as *Djavid Pasha.*

Xhebehâne
Fortified powder depot, i.e. a fortification for storing arms and gunpowder. From Turkish *cebehane, cephane, cepane* 'armoury, storehouse for arms.'

Xhelili, Metë
Highland warrior. Son of Man Halili.

Xhubleta
cf. Jubleta.

Yildiz Palace
Palace on the Bosphorus near Istanbul.

Young Turk
The Young Turks were the founders of an abortive reform movement in the Ottoman Empire. Originally a group of exiles advocating reform, the movement fell under the sway of Turkish army officers of a nationalist bent, who exercised particular influence over the Turkish Government from 1908-1918. Albanian intellectuals initially supported the Young Turk movement, until it evolved into a solely Turkish national movement, contrary to Albanian interests.

Ymeri, Selman
Highland warrior from Plevia. Father of Selim Selmani.

Zaçiri
District in Montenegro.

Zadrima
Geographical and ethnographical region of northern Albania. Zadrima refers to the fertile plain in the District of Lezha, south of Shkodra, through which the Drin River flows before it reaches the town of Lezha. The toponym, recorded in 1515 as *Sadrima* (John Musachi), is of Slavic origin, *za Drima* 'behind or beyond the Drin.'

Zagorja
Settlement in Shkreli tribal territory, northeast of Shkodra, also Alb. *Zagorë,* def. *Zagora.*

Zagorjani
Term for a person from Zagorja.

Zagreb
Capital city of Croatia.

Zana
Figure of northern Albanian mythology. The *zanas,* Alb. *zanë*, def. *zana,* known in southern Albania also as *zërë,* def. *zëra,* are the mountain fairies of Albanian oral literature, similar to the southern Slav *vila.* They dwell near springs and torrents in the Alps of northern Albania and Kosova, where every mountain is said to have its own *zana.* They are envisaged as fair maidens, the muses of the mountains,

who sing, gather flowers and bathe in the nude in alpine springs. *Zanas* are also exceptionally courageous and, like Pallas Athena of ancient Greece, they bestow their protection on warriors, thus the expression to be as "courageous as a *zana,*" Alb. *trim si zana*. Originally a pre-Roman deity, the term *zana* is thought to be related etymologically to the Lat. *Diana*, Roman goddess of the hunt and the moon . Each of the northern tribes had its own *zana,* of which they were proud and which had its own characteristics.

Zana

Name of a mountain nymph, related to *zana* above.

Zdragusha

Term for a type of Serb rifle.

Zefi, Kolë

Highland warrior.

Zefi, Mark Per

Highland warrior.

Zejmen

Settlement in the District of Lezha, situated about six kilometres south of the town of Lezha. The toponym was recorded in 1610 by Marino Bizzi as *Zoime.*

Zeka, Haxhi

Haxhi Mulla Zeka (1832-1902) was a Muslim cleric, nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter born in Shoshan, now in the District of Tropoja. He was among the organizers of the League of Prizren and was chosen as a member of its central council on 10 June 1878. As a landowner and military commander, Zeka took part in fighting in Gjakova against Mehmet Ali Pasha in September 1878. Together with Bajram Curri (1862-1925), he organized uprisings in Peja, Gjakova and elsewhere in Kosova in 1893, for which he was arrested by the Ottoman authorities and kept in detention in Istanbul until 1896. From 1896 to 1900, he was once again at the head of the struggle for autonomy and national self-determination, leading an armed uprising in Kosova in 1897. In an effort to revive the League of Prizren, he founded the *Besëlidhja shqiptare* (Albanian League) in the same year. In late January 1899, Haxhi Zeka organized a meeting of 500 leaders in Peja, most of them from Kosova, that gave rise to the Albanian League of Peja, which he also headed. Zeka was murdered in Peja in 1902 by one Adem Zaimi in a clan dispute. His well-marked grave is found in the yard of the Bajrakli Mosque in the centre of Peja.

Zeka, Lulash

Highland warrior.

Zeka, Spiro
Montenegrin warrior from Nikshiq.

Zeletini
Mountain (2,140 m.) to the northwest of Mount Vizitor in southeastern Montenegro, ~ BCS *Zeletin*.

Zeneli, Kurt
Highland warrior from Plevia, thought to be near Plava in southeastern Montenegro.

Zeneli, Met
Highland warrior under the command of Oso Kuka.

Zeta
Geographical region around Podgorica in southern Montenegro. The Plain of Zeta stretches southwards to Lake Shkodra.

Zeybek
A term for Turks from the Izmir region of western Anatolia.

Zhuba
Unidentified settlement or region said to be east of Lezha.

Zogolli
Ruling family of the Mat region. The most noted representative of this family was Ahmet bey Zogolli, alias Ahmet Zogu (1895-1961), also known as King Zog, who ruled Albania as president from 1924 to 1928 and as king from 1928 to 1939.

Zubci
Montenegrin tribe and traditional tribal region situated between Herceg Novi in Montenegro and Trebinje in Herzegovina.

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Gjergj Fishta is the author of thirty-seven literary publications, but his name is indelibly linked to one great work, indeed to what is perhaps the most astounding creation in all of Albanian literature, the 15, 613-line national literary epic *The Highland Lute*.

Imbued with the spirit of the great epics of classical antiquity, *The Highland Lute* offers a panoramic view of northern Albanian history from 1862 to 1913 and recounts a story which mirrors the long Albanian struggle for freedom and independence. This literary masterpiece is a work of great significance to the Albanian people and, at the same time, constitutes the first Albanian-language contribution to world literature.

This landmark publication makes *The Highland Lute* accessible to the English reader for the first time. Made over a three-year period from 2001-2004, the translation evokes both the majestic style of the original and the traditional culture of the 'wild' northern Albanians, the last surviving heroic culture in Europe.

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